

**BREAKING OUTSIDE THE WALLS:
TEACHERS OF GIFTED AND TALENTED AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES IN
A TEXAS URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL**

A Dissertation

by

SOWANDA NIMMER HENDERSON

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Chair of Committee,	Norvella Carter
Committee Members,	Gwen Webb-Hasan
	Larry Kelly
	Terah Venzant-Chambers
Head of Department,	Yeping Li

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ABSTRACT

Education and its associated resources continue to be unequally administered and delivered in the United States. All stakeholders in the education of the nation's children—parents, teachers, unions, school administrators, principals, community members and students, should be concerned with the inequities which abound in the country's education system African American male cohorts are particularly vulnerable in the US population as they face a series of challenges that continue to threaten their achievement, including those students who are academically gifted. The purpose of this study was to examine and interpret the philosophy, ideology, and educational practices of five teachers of African American males in gifted and talented programs in an urban secondary school.

The following research questions guided the study: (a) How do teachers describe factors that promote achievement with African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs? (b) How do the life experiences of teachers influence their advocacy for African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs? (c) How do Gifted and Talented teachers of African American males participate in and influence identification and referrals of African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs?

The naturalistic paradigm of inquiry guided the study to collect and analyze data. The participant sample consisted of five teachers of African American males in gifted and talented programs in an urban secondary school. In addition to a detailed review of the literature related to this population, data came from in-depth interviews and

classroom observations. Data from the audio recorded and transcribed (verbatim) were analyzed using a thematic analysis.

Some of the major findings reveal that the educational demographic landscape in the US and in Texas in particular highlights an underrepresentation of African Americans, and especially African American males in gifted and talented education. The themes that emerged from the study reveal that valuable insight can be gained from teachers of this cohort which can inform educational practice and policy. The teachers reported to be working hard for the success of all students and not just those from minoritized backgrounds. Nonetheless, all five teachers were committed to believing that all of their students had the potential to be successful, albeit some with more challenges than others. Their experiences and backgrounds frame their ideologies and in turn the way in which they teach and interact with these learners. It is important to note that despite these differences and diversity in their racial/ethnic backgrounds, each teacher reflects deep commitment and passion for these learners. The overall goal reported by the participants is to encourage creative problem solving, to develop content mastery, to serve as a role model for their students, regardless of racial or ethnic background. Ultimately, they believe that these are the keys to the success of all students, and particularly for African American male gifted and talented middle school students.

DEDICATION

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek His will in all you do, and He will show you which path to take” (Proverbs 3:5-6).

This dissertation is dedicated to my family and especially to my pride and my joy, my children, Kennedy Lynette Henderson and Byron Dunstan Henderson, Jr. (BJ).

To my daughter: Kennedy. My first born child, my *baby girl*, the past thirteen years have truly been a blessing for me. I have enjoyed watching you grow into a phenomenal young lady. Keep up the good work and always stay focused on your education. Remember, knowledge is power. Thank you for your encouragement over the years when you could sense I was weary. It took me longer than I expected but I am finally done *baby girl*. I can concentrate more on our ~~–~~Momma/Daughter” time, as I await the day you want to talk about how you like some little boy!! I know you love me *baby girl* and I love you too, all the way till the end of time!!

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xii
LIST OF TABLES	xiii
CHAPTER	
I INTRODUCTION.....	1
Background of the Problem.....	3
A History of Giftedness Defined in the United States	4
Gifted and Talented Programs in the United States	6
Admission Requirements into Gifted and Talented Programs..	9
Gifted and Talented African American Students	10
Teacher Perceptions	12
Statement of the Problem	16
Race in Education.....	17
Purpose of the Study	18
Theoretical Framework	18
Critical Race Theory	18
White Privilege and Domination.....	20
Dysconscious Racism.....	23
Color Blind Ideology.....	24
Three Ring Conception of Giftedness	25
Research Questions	29
Significance of the Study	29
Operational Definition of Terms	32
Summary and Organization of the Report.....	35

CHAPTER		Page
II	REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	36
	Educational Demographic Landscape	37
	The Demographics in Texas.....	38
	Teacher Perceptions	42
	Deficit Model	43
	Teacher Efficacy	45
	Hegemonic Behaviors	46
	Other Reasons for Underrepresentation	48
	Problems with Testing and Identification	48
	Teachers as Vehicles of Student Success	49
	Lack of Culturally Responsive Teachers	50
	Socialization	54
	Teacher Education Programs & Urban Education	57
	Teacher Training in Gifted Education	61
	Overview of Gifted and Talented Education in the US	63
	Critiques	64
	Funding for Gifted and Talented Programs	64
	The State of African American Males in the US.....	69
	The State of African American Males in GT Programs in US.....	71
	The Statistics.....	72
	Gifted and Talented Education in Texas	72
	Gifted and Talented Education in Knowledge ISD.....	73
	EXCEL Program.....	74
	Summary	77
III	METHODOLOGY	78
	Research Design and Methodological Approach	78
	Site Selection.....	80
	Sample Selection	81
	Data Collection.....	82
	Data Analysis and Management.....	84
	Stage One-Transcribing	85
	Stage Two-Profiling and Observation Profile.....	85
	Stage Three-Narrative Analysis	86
	Trustworthiness of the Data	88
	Triangulation	89
	Member Checking.....	89
	Transferability	90
	Dependability and Confirmability.....	90

CHAPTER		Page
	Positionality.....	91
	Summary	94
IV	FINDINGS	95
	An Overview of the Urban Middle School	96
	School Environment.....	97
	Participant Profiles	99
	Betty – The Nurturing Veteran	100
	Gina – The Authoritarian	101
	Monica – The Accountant	102
	Stacy – The Savior	103
	Wanda – The Disciplinarian	104
	Participant Observation Profiles	105
	Betty – The Nurturing Veteran.....	105
	Gina – The Authoritarian.....	106
	Monica – The Accountant.....	107
	Stacy – The Savior.....	109
	Wanda – The Disciplinarian.....	110
	Presentation of Findings: Interviews.....	113
	Making Cultural Connections	113
	Making Connections with Curriculum	116
	Purposeful Pedagogy.....	119
	Building Relationships with Students.....	120
	Determined to Make a Difference	122
	Multiple Means of Identifying	130
	Biased and Unequal	134
	Behavior Challenges.....	135
	Summary.....	138
	Presentation of Findings: Observations	138
V	SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS	140
	Overview and Purpose of the Study	140
	Discussion of the Findings	141
	Addressing the Research Questions	142
	Question One	142
	Question Two	144
	Question Three	145
	My Journey	147
	Implications and Recommendations	150
	Implications for Practice	150

	Page
Implications for Policy	151
Implications for Theory	151
Recommendations for Future Research	152
Concluding Thoughts	152
REFERENCES.....	153
APPENDIX A	183
APPENDIX B	189

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1.1 Renzulli's Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness.....	26

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1.1 Defined Characteristics of The Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness	28
Table 2.1 National Population by Race United States: 2010	39
Table 2.2 National Population by Hispanic or Latino Origin United States: 2010...	39
Table 2.3 Funding Provided at State Level	66
Table 4.1 Demographic Profile of Participants	112

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Advocating for fair and equitable representation of African American males in gifted and talented programs is essential for the recognition, encouragement, and development of the creative brilliance of these learners. Implicit in the goal of education, to help students learn, grow and achieve their full potential, is the notion that all students should be afforded opportunities to capitalize on their promise. Unfortunately, African American male cohorts face a series of challenges that continue to threaten their achievement including those students who are academically gifted (Bonner, 2010). The purpose of this study was to examine and interpret the life experiences and educational practices of five teachers of African American males in gifted and talented programs in urban secondary schools.

The goal of this exploration was to not only highlight the problems related to gifted and talented education as it relates to African American males, but also to underscore the efforts from this group of teachers directed towards increasing and improving learning and developmental opportunities for academically gifted African American males. This study provides, from the perspectives of these teachers, key imperatives and approaches to address challenges and to harness opportunities which can help to meet the needs of gifted and talented African American males.

Throughout history, the United States has struggled with educating its populace with a measure of equity. Although deemed the great equalizer (Bryant, 2000), education, and resources associated with education, continue to be unequally administered and delivered in this great nation. Inclusion and equity remain elusive in the education field. Today, one of the most unrelenting and contentious concerns in education is the disproportionate representation of students of color in special education, including gifted education (Bonner, Lewis, Bowman-Perrott, Hill-Jackson, & James, 2009). This is not a new problem; historically, gifted students of color have not been represented in gifted and talented programs in a reasonable proportion to the nation's overall student population (Maker, 1986; Marland, 1972). Jenkins (1936) wrote one of the earliest articles to address the underrepresentation of students of color, especially African American gifted students. In his article he suggested that gifted children have been at the center of much research while drawing attention to the lack of such research on African American (then called Negro) children. Interestingly, decades later, the malady has not waned. The most recent data from the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights indicate that African American students remain poorly represented in gifted education (U.S. Department of Education, 2008a).

The significance of the problem of academic disparities, especially the persistent underrepresentation in gifted and talented programs (GT), is evidenced by the proliferation of research undertaken by many scholars (Bonner, 2001; Bonner & Jennings, 2007; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Milner & Ford, 2007; Naglieri & Ford, 2003; Polite & Davis, 1999; Strange, 2005; VanTassel-

Baska, Johnson, & Avery, 2002). A review of current literature highlights the severity of the problem for African Americans and for African American males in secondary and postsecondary contexts in particular (Bonner & Evans, 2004; Cuyjet & Associates, 2006; Fashola, 2005; Ginwright, 2004; Hughes & Bonner, 2006; Kershaw, 2001; Kunjufu, 2005; Shujaa, 1994; White & Cones, 1999). These disparities, according to Grantham (2004a), are likely to perpetuate until diversity is addressed holistically, in terms of policy, identification, placement, and retention.

While studying and addressing persistent obstacles such as testing and placement this may increase access for this marginalized group, it is equally important to explore the perceptions of teachers of African American male students in GT programs. Educators play an important role in their student's overall academic development and achievement. Indeed, teachers have the responsibility to seek and implement positive change toward equity in education for their African American students (Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2002). Understanding their perceptions, as well as their life and professional experiences may provide some insight into the world of GT programs and further understanding of the African American males' underrepresentation problem.

Background of the Problem

Research indicates that African American males are most likely to be underrepresented in gifted education programs or advanced placement (AP) courses (Grantham, 2004a, 2004b; Hrabowski, Manton, & Grief, 1998). Many reasons have been put forward to explain the underrepresentation of students of color in GT programs (McKenzie, 1986). These include issues of recruitment and identification as well as

personnel and retention concerns. To fully conceptualize the problem of underrepresentation of African American males in GT programs, it is important to collectively examine the history of giftedness and its related programs while providing a contextual discussion of gifted and talented African American students. For breadth, it is also imperative to discuss teacher perceptions and belief systems related to these students while framing the discussion within the structure of teacher education programs.

A History of Giftedness Defined in the United States

In the United States, gifted education is not federally mandated and this allows for wide variance in gifted education definitions, identification processes of gifted students, and in gifted education programs across various districts and states (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008). Gifted and Talented students first received deliberate attention and service in the 1860's (DeLeon & VandenBox, 1985). But, it was not until almost a century later that Gifted and Talented education was considered normal in public education in the United States. The first formal definition of giftedness was published in 1972 by then Commissioner of Education, Sydney Marland (Marland, 1972). Interestingly, earlier (1964) only two states, Pennsylvania and Georgia, mandated programs for gifted and talented students. Subsequent to this definition, the definition of giftedness has had significant changes over the years with several researchers investigating the changes.

The most significant attempts at broadening the conceptualization of the term giftedness came by Congressional mandate (Bonner & Jennings, 2007). Gifted

Education is defined according to the United States Department of Education's (1993)

National Excellence as:

Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of performance capacity in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, and unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor (p. 26).

Renzulli's (1986) offers views that are in sharp contrast to the Marland Report.

Renzulli's focus is on the gifted behavior rather than solely on the gifted student.

Known for his three-ring notion of giftedness, the focus is targeted on: task commitment, above average ability and creativity, which in any combination are valuable to produce gifted performances.

Gallager (1994), as cited in Renzulli and Reiz (1986), defines gifted behaviors as:

Gifted behavior reflects an interaction among three basic clusters of human traits—above average general or specific abilities, high levels of task commitment, and high levels of creativity. Persons who manifest, or are capable of developing, an interaction among the three clusters requires a wide variety of educational opportunities and services that are not ordinarily provided through regular instructional programs (p. 218)

The Marland Reports (1972) definition of gifted students and Renzulli's (1986) definition of gifted behavior go above and beyond what is defined within regular or mainstream education. Both definitions necessitate an expansion of regular classroom curriculum to meet the needs of gifted students or gifted behaviors. Essentially, these two definitions give school districts and gifted education coordinators latitude in how a

student is identified to be in gifted education. The inconsistencies in how giftedness is interpreted across this nation leads to much deliberation in the field.

Especially for African American males, a definition which considers the nuances of their cultural paradigms and values is crucial (Bonner, Lewis, Bowman-Perrott, Hill-Jackson, & James, 2009). Along with the constant evolution of the definition of giftedness, identification of gifted students is also problematic. Given the inconsistencies with the identification and definition of giftedness, and the underrepresentation of African American males in GT programs, scholars in the field of Gifted and Talented (GT) Education recognize the importance of race in education. Unfortunately, race in education is not theorized as much as other areas of research and study (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). While matters of race are sensitive, it is vital to keep this subject at the forefront so disparities in education can be deliberated and evaluated in a systematic way. This is a particularly important consideration, given the nature of gifted and talented programs in the nation.

Gifted and Talented Programs in the United States

Historically, as a result of the Soviet Union's launch of Sputnik in 1957, a major scientific achievement of the time, DeLeon and VandenBox (1985) recognized the importance of gifted and talented programs as well as the importance of the students those programs serviced in the United States. The President implemented the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) as a means to educate gifted and talented students in an effort to close the gap between the Soviet Union and the U.S. in science and technology. Once the NDEA started subsidizing gifted and talented programs, services for gifted and

talented students reached enormous levels and were found in all states, and not just some states prior to the Acts confirmation (DeLeon & VandenBox, 1985).

Jolly (2009) emphasized that because Americans were on high alert after the launch of Sputnik, the United States immediately implemented various initiatives in regards to public education for Americans. Prior to the launch of Sputnik, the American educational system had already been criticized for being non competitive globally. Afterwards, there were massive amounts of funding put into the American educational system in hopes of filling in deficiencies in the American educational system.

There seems to be consistent strides in the number of states that fund gifted and talented education. Mansfield and Farris (1992) stated that around 81% of school districts offer GT services in the United States. Today, there are about 37 states that have legislation in place for gifted and talented education. Some states (approximately 26) have full or partial mandates to serve gifted and talented students (Information Center on Disabilities and Gifted Education, 2002). There appears to be an inadequate amount of support nationally to meet the needs of gifted learners. Six states fully fund the mandates and five states that have mandates in place but no funding in place to serve gifted and talented students (National Association for Gifted Children, 2008-2009). In the United States, gifted and talented programs vary from one school district to the next, but one constant aspect in gifted and talented programs is the gifted and talented committee which usually consists of teachers, counselors and administrators.

According to the National Association of Gifted Children (2008-2009), there are about 3 million gifted and talented students whose academic needs are not being met in

our current educational system. These gifted and talented students come from culturally and economically diverse backgrounds, various ethnic groups and all have varied life experiences. If gifted and talented students are going to be successful, the educational system needs to be academically demanding and tailored to meet their individual needs to ensure that they all reach their potential, regardless of their backgrounds.

The *State of the States* reports indicate there is deficient national commitment to gifted and talented education. If the commitment to gifted education continues to remain inadequate nationally, upcoming generations of students will not be able to successfully compete globally with other countries. In K-12 education, the government contribution for gifted and talented education is a mere 2 cents of every \$100 (National Association for Gifted Children, 2008-2009). When there is no financial assistance from the federal government in funding gifted and talented education, the burden falls on the states to fund gifted and talented education programs and initiatives.

Because funding is not provided by the states for gifted and talented education, the financial responsibility and determination of how much money gifted and talented programs receive is determined and granted by local school districts. The service that each school district provides to students in gifted and talented education varies on the funding received by the school district (National Association for Gifted Children, 2008-2009). This sets the stage for inconsistencies across districts in terms of administration of gifted and talented education programs, ultimately leaving urban schools that are already competing for resources at a severe disadvantage.

Admission Requirements into Gifted and Talented Programs

The problem of the underrepresentation of African Americans in GT programs is compounded by the challenge of appropriately identifying them for participation in these programs. These common themes in the literature (Bonner, 2001; Grantham, Frasier, Roberts, & Bridges, 2005) are areas of great concern for this cohort in gifted programs. Importantly, schools are operating at will especially where there are no federal or state guidelines for the identification process. Another issue adding to the challenge of identification is that Intelligence Quotient (IQ) tests or other standardized tests are traditionally used to determine placement and educational service needs of students. The controversy over how students are admitted into gifted and talented programs has evolved in the educational realm for decades.

In recent years, several theorists have argued that students should not just be admitted to GT programs based on performance on standardized test scores (Bernal, 2003). According to Ford (2010), students of color generally do not make high scores on standardized testing instruments. In addressing the issue of standardized testing, Renzulli (2005) approached the term “giftedness” from a different standpoint, suggesting that students can meet the gifted definition based on a vast range of criteria and not solely on standardized test scores. In re-evaluating identification practices, additional students will have the opportunity to be serviced in GT programs.

There are multidimensional ways a student can qualify for GT services (Renzulli, 2005) which can allow more children of color admission into GT programs (Tomlinson, Gould, Schroth, & Jarvis, 2006). Further, a significant barrier to their identification is

based on teacher bias and teacher perception (Hopkins & Garrett, 2010). For this reason, teacher beliefs and perceptions of their African American male students are important considerations in this study.

Gifted and Talented African American Students

There are many challenges with the American education system. Because insufficient funding for schools attended primarily by African American students tends to increase the chances of their receiving inadequate general education, gifted and talented programs also tend to suffer (National Research Council, 2002). Additionally, gifted and talented African Americans are not being recognized in education (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b) moreover, Black males continue spiraling further down the achievement ladder and are consistently underrepresented in gifted programs (Whiting, 2006a) . According to Bonner (2001), African Americans have historically dealt with extensive underrepresentation in the nation's schools in gifted and talented programs. Hopkins and Garret (2010) report that the history of inequitable education goes back more than a 100 years in the United States for African Americans. African Americans fought many losing battles before any notable change occurred. In 1849, Roberts v. the City of Boston filed a suit against an unequal education system. The Massachusetts Courts ruled that separate schools did not violate the educational rights of students. This ruling was a setback but it led to a more favorable ruling for African Americans in 1855 when the legislature passed the first law prohibiting school segregation. The history of these prior rulings led to the milestone ruling of Brown v. Board of Education.

The Brown v. Board of Education (1954) abolished racial segregation in schools, and gave all students and equal opportunity to the same education. Henfield, Washington, and Owens (2010) explained that while the 50th anniversary milestone of this landmark case has been celebrated, many years afterwards, Black students are still not afforded the same educational opportunities as their peers. Further, addition to the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) ruling, gifted education is more segregated than general education and that all students in society, regardless of race, should have access. In other words, gifted education, which remains segregated should be open to all groups of students, regardless of their background and administered equitably.

Scholars Garrett and Hopkins (2010) and Gira (2007) believed the Brown v. Board of Education was an integral component in addressing the “separate but equal” issue in education in the United States. While much progress has been made with this ruling, it has not alleviated all injustices in the United States for African American students. There continues to be separate and unequal education in regards to African Americans, but the focus has now switched from segregation to their overrepresentation in special education programs and their underrepresentation in gifted and talented programs (Garret & Hopkins, 2010). The ultimate goal of equal educational opportunities for all students in the U.S. is still unrealized.

The imbalance in the educational system for African American students is further complicated by non-participation. The underrepresentation is perpetuated because of the small percentage selected to participate, for various reasons, many often elect to not engage in the gifted and talented programs. Their concerns stem primarily from negative

peer pressure (Ford 1996; Fordham 1988, 1991; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986), such as alienation from White students in gifted classes and isolation from their African American classmates who accuse them of acting White. Acting White, according to Ogbu (2004) is a negative concept which relates to the historical problem of transitioning from slavery into freedom. Essentially, Blacks who (after emancipation) were seen as adopting White cultural values were admonished and criticized as acting White.

Overall, the gifted and talented programs suffer from a negative reputation as they appear to be a kind of racial segregation (Staiger, 2004) and as Worrell's (2007) study concluded, African American's have to balance academic achievement with the fear of losing their ethnic identity. With the fear of loss of ethnic identity and ridicule from their Black peers who accuse them of Acting White, African American students are often alienated in Gifted and Talented programs. This alienation increases as African American students also tend to suffer from negative stereotypes and from biased teacher perceptions. Examining teacher perceptions is important because these perceptions ultimately affect the recommendation and placement of African American students in gifted and talented education programs.

Teacher Perceptions

When teachers' perceptions of African American students are based on negative stereotypes, this limits their beliefs of what they are capable of in the classroom, and ultimately reduces the number of students that are referred to gifted and talented education programs. When teachers take a positive approach to teaching culturally

diverse students by focusing on the students' strengths, their self-perception becomes positive and gives them the confidence they need to be successful (Kuykendall, 1989). Unfortunately, the attitudes and perceptions of many teachers are embedded in a kind of deficit thinking (Ford, 2010) which has a great impact on societal and educational perceptions.

Popular culture paints a troublesome picture of African American males in society. Unfortunately, they are depicted as a homogeneous, dysfunctional, alienated and threatening group (Gibbs, 1988). With the alarming negative stereotypes of Black males in society, it is very difficult to think highly or positive of this population. As Lewis and Erskine (2008) point out, the African American male's plight is in a crisis state, much in part due to perception. Some of the stereotypical views held of African American males include being portrayed as the "sole perpetrators of many acts of violence" (p. 1), and more specifically are described as:

(a) dysfunctional; (b) drug dealers; (c) pimps; (d) rappers; (e) murders; (f) hyper-sexual; (g) athletic but not intelligent; (h) savages; (i) absentee fathers; (j) dead-beat dads; (k) prisoners; (l) substance abusers; (m) poor; (n) welfare dependent; (o) unemployable; (p) underemployed; (q) a detriment to the community (pp. 2-3)

Because of the stereotypic views of Black males, primarily based on how they are portrayed in the media, it is not realistic to view these males as gifted and talented. Deficit thinking has an astronomical impact on the percentage of Black males that are referred to gifted and talented education. Unfortunately, the deficit way of thinking is so deeply entrenched in urban schools that it mirrors a tendency to adhere to stereotypical ideas and perception (Weiner, 2006). If teachers feel threatened by or afraid of Black

males, they are not likely to think that they could excel (Lewis, 2009) and this would stand true for their performance in gifted and talented education. This type of thinking exists because there are a large number of teachers that are not trained to work with culturally diverse students.

For some time now, the educational landscape has reflected a large population of European American female teachers. According to the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE) (1999), the majority of elementary and secondary school teachers are female and European American. They report that the nation's teacher population is actually 87% European American and 74% female (Snyder, 1998). More recently, nationally, there is elevated concern as there are more European American teachers than there are African American teachers (Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005). Marbley, Bonner, McKisick, Henfield, and Watts (2007) highlight that the demographics have changed over the years in K-12 education; the teacher population remains homogenous in sharp contrast to the diverse demographics of the K-12 population (Middleton, Coleman & Lewis, 2011). In the overall public school system, African American students make up about 20% of the school population, yet African American males comprise only 1% of the teaching force (Kunjufu, 2006).

Deficit thoughts and beliefs can interfere with teachers' expectations of culturally diverse male students. There is a necessity for teachers to change their preconceived thinking about the diverse students in order to adequately focus on the strengths of high achieving students. When teachers are trained to work with diverse groups of students,

they get a chance to deal with their own biases and negative stereotypes. Biases and negative stereotypes can prohibit teachers from being advocates for their students. Additionally, there are many teachers who have not been trained to work with gifted students. Therefore, the gifted and talented African American male student is at a grave disadvantage in the educational realm.

It has been a concern for researchers that the teacher nomination process for gifted and talented students is not viewed the same for culturally and linguistically diverse students. Researchers emphasize the need to use multiple measures and non-traditional tests (Frasier, Garcia & Passow, 1995; Rendon, 1996; Van-Tassel-Baska, Patton & Prillaman, 1991). Due to the lack of low referral rates by teachers, the number of African American students in gifted and talented programs is woefully lacking as it does not represent the number of African American students in public schools.

Teachers, often due to racial misperceptions, frequently have negative attitudes or low expectations of the success of students that come from culturally diverse and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Holliday, 1985; Good & Brophy, 1994). Several researchers (Anyon, 1997; Gay, 2001; Good & Brophy, 1994; Grossman, 1995; Oakes, 1985) have found strong correlations among the educational quality students receive, their race, class, and ethnicity, and teachers' social attitudes toward and expectations of them. Unfortunately, teachers tend to perceive European- and some Asian-Americans in regular and special education to have higher intelligence and academic abilities, and less disciplinary problems than African-, Native, and Latino Americans (Grossman, 1995). The stereotypes that some teachers have about this diverse group of students often cause

them to overlook the educationally talented students from this group to be referred to gifted and talented programs (Elhoweris, Mutua, Alsheikh, & Holloway, 2005). For this reason, teacher perceptions of their students of color are central to this study as well as the programs which prepare these teachers to teach students of color.

Statement of the Problem

Public schools are highly deficient in their identification of African American students in gifted and talented education programs. African American students have historically been underrepresented in gifted programs (Borland, 2004; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Lohman, 2007; McBee, 2006; Naglieri & Ford, 2003). Further, most of the students who are selected for these programs are White and from upper-middle class backgrounds (Borland, 2004; Lockwood, 2007). Some researchers have also found that the underrepresentation of Blacks in GT programs is matched by an overrepresentation of White and Asian Americans (Kitano & DiJiosia, 2002) in these programs. Unfortunately, many of the Black students who are identified for GT programs often decline services (Ford, Harris, Tyson & Trotman, 2002). This issue is compounded by the fact that research literature on retention of African American males in GT programs is limited.

Research suggests that there are many reasons for the lack of persistence or declining of services, among which are deficit thinking (Ford, Harris, Tyson & Trotman, 2002); ethnic identity (Worrell, 2007) and the absence of culturally relevant programming (Ford, Moore & Milner, 2005). While inequity in education abounds for most students of color, since the period of slavery, African Americans have continuously

pursued the fight for equity for their children (Alexander & Alexander, 2005). Especially because of their turbulent and complex past, underrepresentation in gifted and talented programs for African American males brings the discussion of race in education to the forefront. Therefore, additional studies on this topic are warranted.

Race in Education

While you cannot make generalizations about one single cultural group, it would be fair to posit that people of color have long suffered from inequity in education. A review of current literature would reveal that students of color are not being educated at the same rates as their White classmates in the public school system. Although scholars such as Banks (2004) and Sleeter (1996) propose a process for providing equal opportunity, one that educates students using an equity pedagogy frame, systematic racism lies at the core of the United States' educational system. In order to address the problem of underrepresentation of African American males in gifted and talented education programs, it is essential to acknowledge and critique the existing systems of power and privilege using a multicultural education framework (Gorski, 2011). There is a need to examine the ways in which race and racism in education have affected marginalized groups resulting in an inequitable education system.

A mere examination of the inadequacies of the education system to address the individual needs of students of color is not enough for scholars. There is a need to hear the voices of successful GT teachers of AA males in secondary schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify, examine and interpret the philosophy, ideology, and educational practices of five teachers of African American males in gifted and talented programs in an urban secondary school.

Theoretical Framework

The frameworks guiding this research are Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the Three Ring Conception of Giftedness (Renzulli, 1978; 1986). CRT and Renzulli's model will be used as an inter-connected lens through which we can interpret the professional experiences of the teachers of African American males in Gifted and Talented education programs.

Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory is an analytical framework that is the result of the Critical Legal Studies (CLS) movement. The CLS movement was inadequate in addressing racial inequities in the United States jurisprudence system (Hirald, 2010). Critical Race Theory (CRT) examines race in regards to social inequality among dominant and marginalized racial groups (Hirald, 2010). CRT reveals the correlation between race and privilege in the United States (Parker & Villalpando, 2007). Schwandt (2007) defines Critical Race Theory this way:

A theoretical and methodological framework with roots in legal studies, political theory, philosophy, anthropology, and sociology connecting research, policy, and race. It begins from the assumption that race and racism are at the very center of social and institutional life and uses stories, narrative inquiries, and other forms of both quantitative and qualitative study, to challenge existing assumptions and the social construction of race in society. There is no single set of principles to which all critical race theorist subscribe. They are however, united around two central interests—understanding how an establishment of white supremacy and

its subordination of people of color has been created and is perpetuated and undoing the relationship that exists between law and racial power (p. 53).

Critical Race Theory addresses various tenets in regards to social inequities.

Derrick Bell, one of the founding fathers of Critical Race Theory, critiqued how the role of law had an express impact on racially based social and economic oppression (Taylor, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2009). CRT was presented as a theory because Critical race theorists believed that CLS did not adequately address racial injustices in society and that scholars in the CLS field neglected and failed to address how significant racial disparities are intertwined with legal issues in this country (Lynn & Parker, 2006). Presenting CRT as a theory allowed African Americans and people of color to discuss race and racism. History reveals that African Americans and people of color generally always think in terms of theory about social issues and economic issues in a White privileged society (Feagin, 2000). A focal point of Critical Race Theory is to use race and theory as a means to confront customary ideas about diversity and social hierarchy (Schwandt, 2007).

Some of the implications for the use of Critical Race Theory in my study would reveal that fewer African American males are referred to GT programs (based on race) when compared to Whites. Fewer African American males are admitted into gifted and talented programs based on standardized test scores as Whites. Additionally, many teachers teach from a deficit model perspective in regards to African American males.

Ford and Grantham (2003) stated the following which coincides with my study:

...the under-representation of diverse students in gifted education is primarily a function of educators holding a deficit perspective about diverse students. Deficit thinking exists when educators hold negative, stereotypic and

counterproductive views about culturally diverse students and lower their expectations of these students accordingly (p. 217).

Critical Race Theory is used in this study along with Renzulli's Three Ring Conception of Giftedness as a means of understanding and critiquing the systems which place African American gifted and talented students at a disadvantage, primarily because of their race.

White Privilege and Domination

To understand the concept of White privilege, scholars have attempted to tease out what it means, and to discuss how it intersects with other experiences which perpetuate White domination over minority groups (McIntosh, 2004; Landsman, 2011). According to Blackburn and Wise (2009), "White privilege is any advantage, head start, opportunity, or protection from systemic mistreatment, which whites generally have, but people of color do not have" (p. 114). McIntosh (1990) provided a significant list (50 examples) of how White privilege occurs in society to which most White people remain oblivious. This, according to McIntosh (1990) is possible because White privilege is packaged and stored through "knapsacks" of privilege and power, that is, an invisible system of dominance over students of color.

To critique the issue of White privilege and White racism in general, Critical Race Theory is used as a means to confront and critique customary ideas about diversity and social hierarchy (Schwandt, 2007). This is important because as Heinze (2008) points out, "much of the experience of people of color in the United States has been defined by the racist oppression of White America" (p. 4). Given this experience, offering critique in terms of theory is relevant but more so to issues of practicality.

For over a decade, critical race scholars have explored and researched the theoretical significance of CRT and its link to educational theory and practice (Lynn & Parker, 2006). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) through their critical race analysis demonstrate how racism is a persistent historical and ideological construct that could account for inequalities. In everyday language, the term race describes categories of people primarily based on physical characteristics. Defined as a social construct with no scientific credibility, race and racism have prevailed largely because of its cultural significance in a race-conscious society. CRT is an analytical framework which sheds light on why racism persists in society (Lynn & Parker, 2006). CRT has been used by various scholars to explain some of the inequalities in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Tate, 1997). For this study, CRT examines the impact of race and racism in gifted and talented education, particularly as it affects African American males.

In order to justify and perpetuate social domination of students of color racial groups, scientists have used faulty research to maintain hegemonic practices and beliefs (Aguirre & Turner, 2004; Feagin & Feagin, 2003; Lewis, James, Hancock, Hill-Jackson, 2008). With that, the normalcy of racism in America's social order acted as the impetus for CRT. The theory, which stemmed from Critical Legal Studies (CLS), is based on the Gramscian notion of hegemony which describes the oppressive structure in American society. CLS scholarship did not adequately address issues of racism and its influence on societal norms and practices so CRT became a logical result of the discontent of legal scholars of color.

Research scholars continue to embrace CRT studies as a race-based critique, and while all do not agree on all the tenets of CRT, most agree on two key issues. These include an understanding of how White supremacy and oppression of people of color have been created and maintained in America as well as on changing the relationship between law and racial power (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The historic and cultural context of oppression and prejudice experienced by African Americans has distinguished them from other groups (Ogbu, 2004). Many racial prejudices are perpetuated in America's educational system leaving African Americans at a severe disadvantage.

Historically, faulty research acted as justification for Whites to uphold racial discrimination, oppression and segregation, claiming Blacks are inheritable intellectually inferior and education would not be the equalizer (McKee, 1993). Today, it has proven difficult to dispel this false theory of superiority and inferiority based on human traits. Racism has far reaching and powerful implications; it involves domination in social, political, economical and legal processes and is sustained to support racial difference as a method of society's resource allocation (Lewis, James, Hancock, & Hill-Jackson, 2008). For centuries, African American children's achievement has "lagged behind" White students in America's public schools. The context for this disparity comes from a history where educating the enslaved Black population was illegal.

Despite the illegality of education, slaves realized the overall importance and risked their lives in its pursuit. In the 1700's, some 90% of Black Americans were not educated as opposed to 90% of White Americans who were educated (Anderson, 1995). Acknowledging education as the way to a better life, many slaves actively sought

education as it was valued as a means of resistance (Anderson, 1988) and a mechanism against oppression. Blacks valued education and continued to pursue it in the post-Civil War South (Anderson, 1988) and their fight to gain it continued through Reconstruction and into the Civil Rights Movement (Chapman, 2005). A precursor to the Civil Rights Movement was the decision of *Brown v. the Board of Education* in 1954 which signaled the way for desegregated classrooms. This desegregation was supposed to be the tool for better educational opportunities (Payne, 2004). Unfortunately, African American students were immersed into a system of inequity, one which was not geared towards their ultimate success (Tatum, 2004) and the achievement gap remains. The continued marginalization of African American students is a form of dysconscious racism that accepts the dominant White norms and privileges (Thomas, 2003; King, 1991). Examining dysconscious racism in the public school system may shed some light on the problem of underrepresentation of African American males in gifted and talented programs.

Dysconscious Racism

The idea that privilege and White privilege in particular is embedded systematically in cultural institutions which result in status quo or taken- as- the- norm ideologies was originally described as dysconscious racism. It is an ~~un~~critical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequality and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given Dysconscious racism is a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant White norms and privileges” (King, 1991, p. 133). Although appearing in the form of less blatant stereotypes,

dysconscious racism occurs without the offender realizing the personal bias (Thomas, 2003). Many teachers, according to Ladson-Billings (1994) are uncomfortable in acknowledging and valuing racial differences in their students often resulting in perpetuating the problem of dysconscious racism.

Dysconscious racism continues to marginalize African American students (The Civil Rights Project, 2001) perpetuating the achievement gap between White and Black students. Another practice that supports dysconscious racism and the marginalization of African American students is the color blindness approach.

Color Blind Ideology

Pearce (2005) explained that color blindness is the most common practice among White teachers and leaders when they are faced with a racially diverse learning and teaching environment. It is a so-called admission to be blind to race and color although it causes the perpetuation of the privilege, power and domination that arise from it. Color blindness and racial neutrality is a benevolent response to overlook White privilege. Ford (2010) explains that color blindness is another barrier to the underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted education. Colorblindness is generally present when educators do not value how critical culture is in learning. Culture is important also in the areas of curriculum development, instruction in the classroom, various assessment measures, and the expectations of educators (Ford, 2010). Usually, colorblindness means not seeing any differences and treating each individual the same; however, as Ford (2010) explains, it is contradictory and not a fair or realistic approach for gifted education students that are culturally diverse.

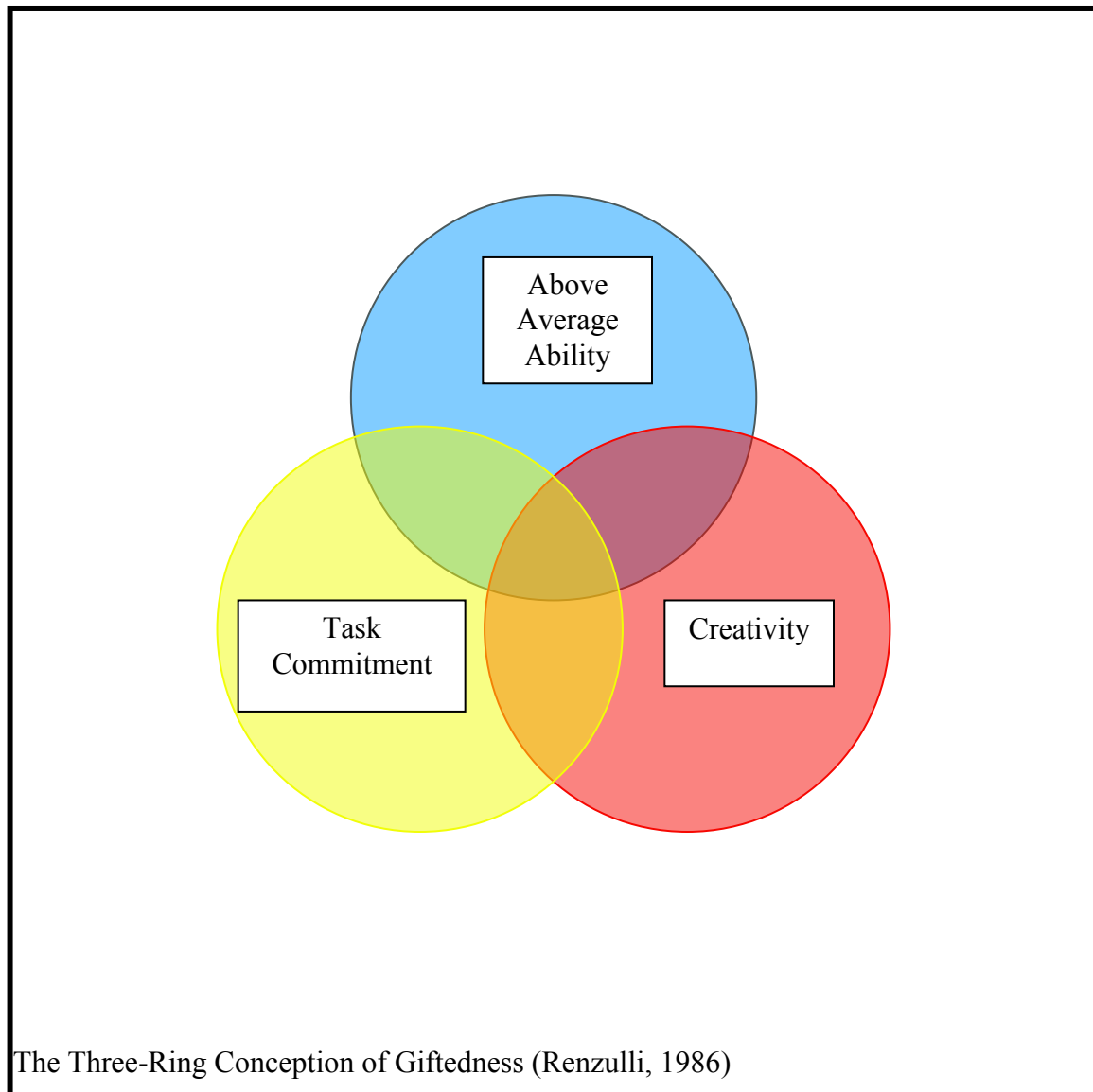
Concerns in this study stem from the inequitable distribution of education resources for African American learners, and in particular their underrepresentation in GT educational programs and initiatives.

Three Ring Conception of Giftedness

Terman (1925) felt that a student's intelligence was a key factor of getting into gifted and talented programs. He felt so strongly that he stated that gifted and talented students should score in the top 2% on standardized tests. This way of thinking still exists today as a criterion for student's admission into gifted and talented programs. Heward (2000) stated that 73% of school districts in this country use standardized test scores as the primary indicator of determining a student's cognitive abilities when determining which students will be in gifted and talented programs. In an effort to broaden human understanding of the notion of giftedness as more than schoolhouse of test-taking giftedness, Renzulli (1986) proposes a three ring theory which is based on the interaction of above average ability, creativity, and task commitment which results in creative productive giftedness. (See Figure 1.1)

Figure 1.1

Renzulli's Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness



It is important to recognize the way in which gifted and talented children can shape future generations. Using this model is particularly useful as giftedness is a multifaceted trait, one that is more complex than being skilled at high stakes testing or high intelligence alone (Sternberg, 1982, 1990). Especially since standardized tests, particularly IQ tests, are most often used as a means of identification (Bernal, 1990), Renzulli proposes that the focus must change. This is particularly important for African American learners.

Cloud (2007) reported that ~~for~~ reasons no one understands, African Americans' IQ scores have tended to cluster about a standard deviation below the average—evidence for some that the tests themselves are biased (p. 46). Given existing research which suggests African Americans are disadvantaged in taking high stakes or standardized testing (Cloud 2007), Renzulli's Three Ring Model purports a more wholesome understanding of giftedness. It delineates certain characteristics as attributes of gifted and talented learners, (See Table 1.1) which if applied, could address some measure of the underrepresentation of African American males in gifted and talented education.

Table 1.1
Defined Characteristics of the Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness

Above Average Intelligence	Creativity	Task Commitment
Advanced vocabulary Good memory	Questioning; very curious about many topics	Sets own goals, standards
Learns very quickly and easily	Has many ideas (fluent)	Intense involvement in preferred problems and tasks
Large fund of information Generalizes skillfully	Sees things in varied ways (flexible)	Enthusiastic about interests and activities
Comprehends new ideas easily	Offers unique or unusual ideas (original)	Needs little external motivation when pursuing tasks
Makes abstractions easily	Adds details; makes ideas more interesting (elaborates)	Prefers to concentrate on own interest and projects
Perceives similarities, differences, relationships	Transforms or combines ideas	High level of energy
Makes judgments and decisions	Sees implications or consequences easily	Perseveres; does not give up easily when working
	Risk-taker; speculates	Completes, shares products
	Finds subtle humour, paradox or discrepancies	Eager for new projects and challenges
		Assumes responsibility

Treffinger (1986, p. 40)

The data for this study was collected and analyzed using CRT and Renzulli's three ring model as a lens to explore and interpret the experiences of the five teachers of gifted and talented African American students. By using a narrative approach, the study sought to understand how the teachers' philosophies and personal history and experiences inform and influence their practice of teaching African American males in gifted and talented programs in an urban school.

Research Questions

The following three research questions guided the study:

1. How do teachers describe factors that promote achievement with African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs?
2. How do the life experiences of teachers influence their advocacy for African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs?
3. How do Gifted and Talented teachers of African American males participate in and influence identification and referrals of African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs?

Significance of the Study

Studying the issue of giftedness and the unequal access to GT programs faced by African American males, is critical for several reasons. For obvious reasons, gifted and talented children bring creative intellect to the classroom and to the community in general. These gifted students are cherished because of the possible contributions they can make to society in a vast array of circumstances and situations. Undoubtedly, these contributions can increase quality of life; they are the select who will cure diseases,

design great buildings, and some will write manuscripts that win national prizes. Some will even educate our children or our children's children. Gifted and talented children will provide solutions to major issues and challenges in our society. Many US leaders recognize that gifted and talented children are among the nation's most precious natural resources (Sternberg, 1997) and these valuable assets should be nurtured and encouraged to excel in the national workforce and in their personal endeavors.

This study is significant because it will provide insight into issues related to the experiences of teachers who teach African American males in gifted and talented programs. These insights will be valuable to parents, teachers, gifted coordinators, principals, superintendents, as well as national and state-level policy makers as they may serve as learning tools to address some of the challenges facing this cohort of students

A substantial amount of literature has been written on the underrepresentation of African American males in gifted and talented programs (Baldwin, 1985; Bonner, 2001; Chinn & Hughes, 1987; Plummer, 1995; Robinson, Bradley & Stanley, 1990; Worrell, 2003). This review of literature reveals that race is a key factor in the underrepresentation of African American males in gifted and talented programs. However, there continues to be inadequate information available in relation to the success some teachers have with African American males in gifted and talented programs in secondary education. This success can be modeled across the country to reach more African American male students if the voices of the teachers can be used as a teaching tool in education.

The voices of these teachers may be used as an education tool to reach the masses of unidentified gifted and talented African American male students. Through dialogue with the teachers who are successful with this population, an increase of African American males in gifted and talented programs will manifest in secondary urban education. This study will attempt to fill the void by encompassing the voices and personal stories and educational experiences of five teachers of African American males in gifted and talented programs.

Essentially, the significance of this study centers on its implications for positive social change as well as the contributions it will make to the inadequate literature on the perspectives of teachers of African American males in GT programs. My goal is to contribute to the literature seeking to alleviating problems that African American males face related to gifted and talented programs.

Operational Definition of Terms

The following are key terminology and subsequent definitions used in this study.

Achievement Gap- This refers to the disparity on a number of educational measures between the performance of groups of students, especially groups defined by gender, race/ethnicity, ability, and socioeconomic status (Landsman & Lewis, 2006).

Acting White- This term refers to African Americans ~~abandoning~~ Black cultural and dialect frames of reference to behave and talk primarily according to White frames of reference (Ogbu, 2004, p. 21) to achieve success in a predominantly White institution.

African Americans – This term refers to U. S. residents and citizens who have an African biological and cultural heritage and identity. Used synonymously and interchangeably with Blacks and Black Americans, in this study, these terms describe both a racial and a cultural group (Banks & Banks, 2007).

Code Switching- A practice in which individuals alter their behavioral patterns to conform to a current environment.

Dysconscious Racism- This is a form of racism which promotes the acceptance of dominant White norms and privileges; cultural institutions can produce a false sense of consciousness in which power and oppression become taken-for-granted realities or ideologies (King, 1991).

Ethnic Group – A micro cultural group or collectivity that shares a common history and culture, values, behaviors, and other characteristics that cause members of the group to have a shared identity. A sense of people hood is one of the most important characteristics of an ethnic group (Banks & Banks, 2007).

European American – Americans whose biological and cultural heritage originated in England or Americans with other biological and cultural heritages who have assimilated into the dominant or mainstream culture in the United States. This term is often used to describe the mainstream U.S. culture or to describe most White Americans (Banks & Banks, 2007).

Gifted and Talented Coordinator- The Gifted and Talented Coordinator is the individual responsible for the gifted and talented educational programs on campus.

Gifted Education - Children and youth with outstanding talent perform or show the potential for performing at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high performance capacity in intellectual, creative, and/or artistic areas, and unusual leadership capacity, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school. Outstanding talents are present in children and youth from all cultural groups, across all economic strata, and in all areas of human endeavor (U. S. Department of Education, 1993, p. 26).

Perception- The process, act, or faculty of perceiving; the representation of what is perceived.

Pre-service Teacher- Undergraduate student in the field of Education.

Race – A term that refers to the attempt by physical anthropologist to divide human groups according to their physical traits and characteristics. This has proven to be very difficult because human groups in modern societies are highly mixed physically (Banks & Banks, 2007).

Secondary Schools – Schools that comprise grade levels 7-12. Middle school and high school are considered secondary schools.

Stakeholders – For purposes of this study, stakeholders refer to any individual or group of individuals who have an interest in meeting the needs of African American male learners.

Teacher Preparation- Also referred to teacher training or teacher education. For purposes of this paper, teacher preparation typically refers to undergraduate teacher education programs.

Urban Setting - This relates to a city environment.

Urban School District – A school district that has more than 50,000 students attending school in the district.

Voices- The right or opportunity to express a choice or opinion.

White- A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East (U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2002).

White Privilege- This is a sociological concept which describes certain advantages and privileges enjoyed by White people beyond what is commonly experienced by non-White people in those same social, political, and economic spaces. Often, the person who is benefitting remains unaware of the inherent privilege (McIntosh, 1990).

Summary and Organization of the Report

This introductory chapter presented the background for the study which will seek to examine and interpret the life experiences and educational practices of five teachers of African American males in gifted and talented programs in urban secondary schools. This study consists of five chapters. In Chapter I, I presented the background of the study, the statement of the problem, purpose and significance of the study.

Chapter II follows with a review of relevant scholarship which informs the study. This includes issues related to the guiding theoretical framework, further details on giftedness, African Americans and gifted and talented programs, teacher perceptions and teacher education programs. The chapter concludes with a summary of how race (racism) informs the problem of underrepresentation of African American males in GT programs. Chapter III outlines the proposed methodological approach including data collection, management and analysis. Chapter IV will present the study's findings and Chapter V will conclude with a summary and discussion of the implications as they relate to theory, policy and practice followed by recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to develop a context that explains, the presentation of pertinent literature, the relevance and uniqueness of the study as outlined in Chapter I. Embedded in this chapter are major findings in empirical research that surround the underrepresentation of students of color in gifted and talented education programs. First, it presents a portrait of the educational demographic landscape in the United States as well as specific details of the demographics in Texas. Second, it highlights literature related to teacher perceptions as one of the reasons for African American underrepresentation in GT education and third, a contextual discussion of teacher education programs as well as an overview of Gifted and Talented Education in the US, in Texas, and the school district in which the study occurred. The chapter concludes with a summary that captures the main essence of the chapter.

All stakeholders in the education of the nation's children—parents, teachers, unions, school administrators, principals, community members and students, should be concerned with the inequities which abound in the country's education system. The way the system operates perpetuates a continued failing of African American students where general education is unable to meet their social and academic needs (Losen & Orfield, 2002). This failure results in their over representation in special education (Blanchett, Mumord & Beachum, 2005; Losen & Orfield, 2002) and their underrepresentation in gifted and talented and advanced placement programs highlighting a distinct kind of racism in the public school system (Green, McIntosh, Cook-Morales, & Robinson-

Zanartu, 2005). Inequality in educational opportunities has existed in this country for centuries, embedded in a systematic framework of White privilege.

Educational Demographic Landscape

In order to best understand the underrepresentation phenomenon, it is useful to take a look at the demographic landscape of the United States and her education system. Over the last twenty or so years, the demographic portrait of America and American public schools has been changing. This is significant as the shift in demographics is due largely in part to increases in students of color in the population. According to the US Census Bureau, in 2002, Hispanics made up 13.5% of the population, 68.2% was White, 11.8% was Black, 4.0% was Asian, 0.6% was American Indian or Alaska native, and 0.1% was Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (Census Bureau, 2004). A 2008 Census Report indicated that the Hispanic population reached 45.5 million in 2007, accounting for 15% of the overall population. In addition, the Census Bureau estimates that the Hispanic population will grow to approximately 25% of the total U.S. population by the year 2050. The most recent census reports (US Census, 2010) suggest that more than half of the growth in the US population over the last ten years (2000-2010) was due to the increase in the Hispanic population.

This means that of the total population (308,745,538) in 2010, 50.5 million are Hispanics composing 16 percent of the total population. Between 2000 and 2010, the Hispanic population grew by 43 percent—rising from 35.3 million in 2000, when this group made up 13 percent of the total population. The Hispanic population increased by 15.2 million between 2000 and 2010, accounting for over half of the 27.3 million

increase in the total population of the United States. Based on the National Population by Race statistics, as reported by the 2010 Census Bureau, the White population experienced the smallest increase (5.7%) when compared to all other (students of color) groups, notably for Blacks (12.3%) and Hispanics (43%).

The Demographics in Texas

Also according to the 2010 Census Bureau, the demographics in Texas reveal that some 8% of the population is reported as Black or African American. Only 1% of the population is of American Indian or Alaska Native ancestry. 7 % of the Texas population are Asian, none are from Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. On the other hand, the Texas population is 36% Hispanic/Latino and 48% are White.

Table 2.1
National Population by Race United States: 2010

NATIONAL POPULATION BY RACE UNITED STATES: 2010			
PERCENT OF POPULATION		CHANGES 2000-2010	
White	72.4%	5.7	+
Black	12.6%	12.3%	+
American Indian	0.9%	18.4%	+
Asian	4.8%	43.3%	+
Native Hawaiian	0.2%	35.4%	+
Other Races	6.2%	24.4%	+
Multiple Races	2.9%	32.0%	+

Table 2.2
National Population by Hispanic or Latino Origin United States: 2010

NATIONAL POPULATION BY HISPANIC OR LATINO ORIGIN UNITED STATES: 2010			
PERCENT OF POPULATION		CHANGES 2000-2010	
Hispanic	16.3%	43.0%	+
Not Hispanic	83.7%	4.9%	+

Source: U. S. Census Bureau (2010). United States Census 2010: *It's In Our Hands*.

While the demographics of the nation continue to grow more diverse, teachers in the schools across the nation are even more homogeneous. Teachers in America are predominately White. Recent educational census data highlight these trends; 65% of public school students are White, 12% Black, 15% Hispanic, and 4.5 % Asian/Pacific Islander. The same reports show that 84% of public school teachers were White, 6% Black, and fewer than 6% Hispanic (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009). Within the state of Texas, the Texas Education Agency has an objective to maintain a teaching workforce that is reflective of the racial/ethnic composition of the state (Kirby, Naftel, & Berends, 1999). This is a monumental task, both in the United States as a whole and in the state of Texas.

Nearly one-third of school age children in the United States are students of color compared to only about 12% of teachers (Archer, 2000). In Texas, the school system is about 58% students of color and only 27% teachers of color (Marshall & Marshall, 2003). Additionally, despite this shift in diversity for students of color and inadequate representation of teachers of color, little has changed in the area of underrepresentation of students of color, especially African Americans, in gifted education initiatives. Further complicating the matter for students of color is the social-structural inequality paradigm (Lewis, James, Hancock & Hill-Jackson, 2008) which suggests that schools in themselves are created as a result of, and are maintained and perpetuated by racist ideologies, policies and practices in education (Aguirre & Turner, 2004; Feagin & Feagin, 2003; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). Unfortunately, the end product is an inequitable education system which preserves the achievement gap between White and Black

students (Anyon, 1980; Kozol, 1991, 2005). Within this disparity, African American students are excluded from educational initiatives such as gifted and talented programs, in a disproportionate way when compared to their Caucasian classmates.

The statistics which reveal the contrast of the diverse student population and the homogenous teaching population are worthy of note, especially for children of color, because teachers' attitudes regarding race and class are closely tied to classroom dynamics and student achievement (Gay, 2000; Rist, 2000, Watson, Charner-Laird, Kirkpatrick, Szczesiul & Gordon, 2006). Importantly, one of the reasons some educators fail to meet the specific needs of diverse students is because of a cultural disconnect.

Villegas (1998) demonstrated that there is a link between low-level achievement by students of color and the differences between the culture of the students and their teachers. Gay (2000) also suggested that the cultural mismatch or disconnect between teachers and their students may be one of the important variables affecting the academic success of students of color. Because of the grave disconnect between some teachers and their diverse students, there is an increase in reliance on stereotypes which are part of society's culture, negatively affecting teacher perceptions of their diverse students. Therefore, the perception teachers have of their students is another important variable in the academic success of diverse students.

Teacher Perceptions

Teachers are charged with providing learning opportunities for learners, regardless of their race or their background. We, as educators are challenged to nurture curiosity and to assist learners to achieve their true potential. A premier responsibility teachers have is to harness and encourage all learners, including the students who are gifted and talented. Cross (2001) highlights the importance of developing learning options, criteria for identifying gifted students, as well as training teachers how to best facilitate affective classroom management strategies. This requires creating programming options that celebrate the unique differences of each student in the classroom.

African American males are often at the losing end of the educational system and are often considered at-risk (Bailey & More, 2004; Davis, 2003; Moore, 2000). Terms or phrases associated with African American males often magnify the negative stereotypes of this group. National statistics reveal that African American males will encounter vast challenges in society (Hoffman, Llagas, & Synder, 2003). African American male students that are GT students are valuable to society in so many ways.

Acknowledging and celebrating the unique differences of the learners from diverse populations is essential in combating the underrepresentation of African American males in gifted and talented programs. It requires a paradigm shift away from deficit thinking or understanding of diverse students.

Deficit Model

Antiracist scholars have exposed traditional justifications and explanations for the achievement gap. Deficit thinking reinforces the idea that children who possess genetic, cultural, neighborhood or family differences, are inferior (Carter, 2005; Nieto, 2002; Valencia, 1997). The deficit model of thinking is born out of a systematic racist ideology which has far reaching implications for the African American learner.

Nieto (2000) explains how the deficit model is based on the assumption that some students, because of genetic, cultural, or experiential differences are operating with a “deficit” and are inferior to other children. Valencia (1997) conceptualized deficit thinking in six main ways. This includes an element of blame on the victim, discourses of genetic pathology, culture of poverty, poor home life, poor parenting, and other accumulated environmental deficit models as the true causes of academic failure.

Some educators view African American students as “culturally deprived or disadvantaged” (Ford, Harris, Tyson & Trotman, 2002, p. 1) and indicators of deficit thinking include (a) lack of educator preparation to correctly interpret the results of standardized tests, (b) failure to identify students of color, and (c) rejection of offers to participate in gifted programming by students of color. The deficit thinking model is an umbrella concept which encompasses the racist theories of African American educational issues, for teachers, principals, and other school district leaders.

According to Carter and Larke (2003) teachers often are trained to see their students’ areas of weakness and to develop instructional plans to meet their needs. In the deficit view, teachers tend to think of and talk about their students in terms of their

presumed weakness, lack of motivation, and poor family support (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, p. 608). Many teachers look at the social ills that go on in students lives such as single parent homes, drug infested neighborhoods, and gangs as an indicator of the student's success. Contrary to this model, social ills do not dictate if a student can excel academically and be successful in his or her academic quest (Carter & Larke, 2003). Teachers who work under the deficit model believe that it does not matter what they think about a student's academic success because they feel that if the children come from an environment that has or depicts social ills the student cannot be successful academically.

The deficit model in relation to urban GT programs is prevalent in the American school system. This is a major issue in regards to the underrepresentation of African American males in gifted and talented programs. Some teachers look at the students' home and social environment as indicator of the student's success in the classroom. This model negatively affects the number of African American students that are referred to GT programs in urban communities.

The deficit model is unlike teacher efficacy where the burden lies with the teacher when the student is not successful; with the deficit model if the student is not successful, the burden of not being successful lies with the student. In addition, Carter and Larke (2003) highlight that it is imperative for teachers to shed the deficit model and welcome models of resilience that focus on the students' strengths and unique capabilities. Teachers who subscribe to the deficit model of thinking perceive their diverse students as low achievers.

Good (1987) explained that when teachers perceive their students as having low potential, they interact with them in very specific ways which do not foster academic achievement. Additionally, teachers who exhibit characteristics of the deficit model typically have low teacher efficacy. They believe they can teach students, just not those students that exhibit or come from backgrounds traditionally associated with social ills.

Teacher Efficacy

Research shows that there is a relationship between teacher efficacy and the success rates of teachers of underserved students (Carter & Larke, 2003). Teacher efficacy is the measure of the teacher's confidence in their personal ability to promote student learning (Hoy, 2000). Bandura (2001) defines teacher efficacy as a teacher's belief that students in his or her classroom can learn and that he or she can teach them. Carter (2003) extends the definition by suggesting that teacher efficacy relates to the extent that a teacher believes she can not only teach children, but also to make a difference in their lives.

Teacher efficacy can range from low teacher efficacy to high teacher efficacy. Teachers with a higher teacher efficacy find teaching fulfilling and rewarding. When teachers exhibit a high sense of teacher efficacy, they expect more from students with the goal in mind of being successful. Teachers that exhibit teacher efficacy review and evaluate themselves when students are not successful in the classroom, these teachers look for methods to improve themselves. According to Carter and Larke (2003), these teachers spend less time with classroom discipline because their belief system is that

they see themselves as being successful teachers meeting the needs of each and every student in the classroom.

Teacher efficacy in relation to urban GT programs is an integral component for student's success. If teacher efficacy is low, those teachers believe they can reach the student but they can only do so much in that endeavor. When teacher efficacy is high, those teachers believe they can do any and everything possible to meet the needs of the students and that no matter what those students will be successful. In an urban GT program where some students are not achieving high levels of success, teachers that exhibit a high degree of teacher efficacy will meet those students that may think they are in the wrong place. Teachers who portray teacher efficacy believe they can teach any student in spite of whatever social ills he or she might encounter. Along with issues of deficit thinking and teacher efficacy, hegemonic behaviors play a role in the underrepresentation of African American males in gifted and talented education programs.

Hegemonic Behaviors

Hegemonic behavior is a process which the dominant culture maintains its dominant position (Carter & Larke, 2003). Hegemonic behavior is often times not easy to identify because the individuals being exploited are going along with accepted societal norms. According to Carter & Larke (2003), students may know they have been in a classroom environment in which they know they have been demoralized, but are not able to identify this behavior as hegemonic behavior because all the rules have been followed in the classroom or educational system. The example that Carter and Larke

(2003) discuss in reference to hegemonic behavior is when a teacher calls on all students in the class to give their opinion on a certain issue as discussed in the classroom. All the students are allowed to give their opinion. However, the teacher does not validate all the students' opinions in the class. The teacher generally will validate those students' comments that closely follow his or her belief system. Consenting to this behavior is consenting to behavior that does not value the contributions of all students.

Hegemonic behaviors in urban GT programs, like in any other setting, exist but are often difficult to identify. Students in urban GT programs who are admitted into GT programs often find themselves unable to relate to others students of their social group and find that they do not have anyone to identify with in the GT program. As a result, some African American students who are selected to participate in GT programs choose to be put out or they quit the GT program. This happens mostly when they realize their discomfort and inability to socialize with others from the same background or ethnic group. This is an example of hegemonic behavior practice in GT programs. The students are unaware that they are contributing to their own oppression by choosing certain actions that put them out of the GT program, actions that social norms dictate are unacceptable.

While deficit thinking, low teacher efficacy and hegemonic behavior contributes to the underrepresentation of African American males in gifted and talented education programs, Bonner (2001) indicates that scholars go back and forth as to why there is an underrepresentation of African American males in gifted and talented programs in the United States.

Other Reasons for Underrepresentation

Questions of inequity in educational opportunity are not a new. Having a quality teacher can affect the educational opportunity of a child (Darling-Hammond, 2000) require educators pay special attention to the underlying reasons why many African American males are experiencing difficulty in academic achievement (Zirkel, 2004). In fact, some scholars suggest that the failure on the part of the public education system to address the inequalities with children of color is a direct threat to our claims to be a truly democratic country (Scheurich, Skrla & Johnson, 2000).

A review of literature suggests that there are three main challenges that are unique to African American males in gifted and talented programs: (a) testing and identification, (b) culturally responsive teachers and (c) socialization.

Problems with Testing and Identification

The controversy over how students are admitted into gifted and talented programs has evolved in the educational realm for decades. In recent years there have been several theorist that have argued that students should not be admitted based solely of performance on standardized test scores. Oakes (1995) explains that African American children often score lower on standardized tests and this serves as justification for their placement in lower track, remedial or special education programs. One corollary to the over representation of African American males in special education is their underrepresentation in gifted and talented education. Their placement in special education programs also increases the likelihood that they become subject to various kinds of school discipline (Simpson, 2001). The cycle continues as teachers of African

American students who have them placed on lower tracks or in special education, often discourage them from enrolling in Advanced Placement courses as well as gifted education programs.

Teachers as Vehicles of Student Success

In Bonner's (2011) study, two gifted and talented African American male collegiate students discuss how their relationship with faculty influenced their academic success during their college experience. The research was conducted at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) and a Traditionally White Institution (TWI). Bonner evaluated traditional components to determine giftedness among both African American males students. He looked at Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and American College Test (ACT), both which are standardized test scores, as well as their grade point average in high school and college, which needed to range on a 4.0 scale above 3.5 (Bonner, 2011).

One of the most valuable components of a student's collegiate experience is the relationships the students have nurtured with the faculty at the university. There are other factors such as student intelligence, as well as the foundation that was set forth in regards to the student's academic success. The relationships that both gifted African American males had at the HBCU and TWI were somewhat different at each institution and both research participants agreed that the faculty liaisons were key to their academic success.

According to Bonner (2011), Trey attending the TWI and he felt his professors assisted him academically to be successful in school; however, he did not make a social

connection with the professors at the university. His relationships with his teachers were not leisurely relationships, the relationships he fostered were strictly academic in nature. Since Trey viewed his relationship strictly academically with his professors he formed a detachment with faculty at the TWI. Bonner (2011) stated that Stephen's relationship with his professors was very similar to Trey's relationships when it came to academics. Stephen worked very closely with his professors at the HBCU in regards to his academics. But where Trey did not foster social relationships outside his academics, Stephen did foster relationships and bonded with his professors on a social and personal level outside the academy (Bonner, 2011).

Lack of Culturally Responsive Teachers

According to Milner and Ford (2007), teachers can improve or add to their teaching repertoire when they work at becoming culturally responsive. Teachers should take on a need to understand their students' culture. As teachers take on the challenge to become more culturally aware of students beliefs in society they will often uncover their own hidden stereotypes and belief systems that cause them to not be as culturally sensitive in regards to meeting the educational needs of students. Cultural and multicultural belief systems of teachers appear to be a contributing factor to the inadequate number of students of color in gifted programs (Milner & Ford, 2007). When culturally relevant pedagogy or culturally responsive teaching is utilized in the classroom, culturally linguistic and diverse (CLD) students will be successful (Ford, Grantham, & Whiting, 2008; Mattai, Wagle, & Williams, 2010).

Even though the chances the students will not be successful increases for CLD students when certain pedagogy teaching styles are not used in the classroom, the odds increase even more for African American students (Mattai, Wagle & Williams, 2010).

Teachers that have insufficient experiences in their ever day lives in regards to cultural experiences find it difficult to make connection with students in the classroom. The lack of cultural experiences that teachers have with CLD students has a significant impact on the number of CLD students that are referred or placed in gifted education. According to Mattai, Wagle & Williams (2010), there is a strong correlation between teachers' perceptions of students and the students' performance academically. These perceptions are not written or stated verbally, these perceptions are unspoken perceptions of the teacher. Perceptions that teachers have about CLD students effects the number of students in gifted and talented programs.

The work of scholars Gay and Ladson-Billings also inform this research study. Gay's (2000) culturally responsive approach to teaching explains the nature of the cultural connections between students and teachers. It is defined according to the use of the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, and performance styles of diverse students in an effort to make learning more appropriate and effective for them. The main premise of culturally responsive teaching is that it is a productive method of teaching which teaches to and through the strengths of the diverse students.

Gay (2000) makes five recommendations for culturally responsive teaching: (a) validation for all students, (b) comprehensive, (c) multidimensional, (d) empowering, and (e) transformative. This requires incorporating the learners' culture in curriculum

design and instruction and teaching the whole child. For this approach to be effective, it requires sharing variety of culturally diverse perspectives which are empowering and transformative.

In the same vein, Ladson-Billings (2000) focuses on successful teaching of African Americans as teaching which promotes culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally relevant practice is described as having specific characteristics. According to Ladson- Billings (1994), these include:

1. Teacher sees herself as an artist, teaching as an art and as a part of the community and teaching as giving something back to that community.
2. Teacher believes all students can succeed and encourages all to make connections to their community, national, and global identities.
3. Teacher sees teaching as pulling knowledge out.
4. Teacher-student relationship is equitable and extends beyond the classroom where she demonstrates connectedness with all students.
5. Teacher encourages a community of learners.
6. Teacher encourages collaborative learning; students are responsible for each other.
7. Knowledge is continuously created and is viewed critically
8. Teacher is passionate about content and helps students develop necessary skills
9. Teacher sees excellence as a complex standard that takes diversity into account (pp. 34, 55, 81)

Ladson-Billings (1994) stated these teacher characteristics of culturally relevant practice are essential for the success of African Americans. This kind of pedagogy is applicable to all kinds of classroom settings (Willis & Lewis, 1998). It is on this basis that it is critically important to develop cultural competence from early in the career and educational development of teachers.

Teacher preparation programs have been criticized because studies revealed that some of the most common problems new teachers face is reduced when they have sufficient, over-all preparation prior to assuming the role of teacher (Adams, Hutchinson, & Martray, 1980). Assisting pre-service teachers to become culturally cognizant should be continuously addressed in pre-service programs. Challenging pre-service teacher beliefs for greater impact was found to be crucial in several studies (Anderson & Holt-Reynolds, 1995; Hollingsworth, 1989). These studies focused on educators' awareness of pre-service teacher beliefs. Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher and James (2002) emphasized the importance of pre-service teachers developing an understanding of their own beliefs. These studies highlight the need for teachers and teacher educators to be aware of their own beliefs as they teach students who hold a wide variety of beliefs.

To reference other relevant studies, Milner, Flowers, Moore, Moore III, & Flowers (2003) conducted a replica of Larke's (1990) study which looked at pre-service teachers to approximate the number of pre-service teachers having a knowledge base of various cultural differences. In the replicated study, data from 99 pre-service teachers who completed the Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory were used to explore the

question of how well their teacher education programs were preparing teachers to be more multicultural.. Based on the original study, Larke (1990) stated that pre-service teachers were culturally, racially, and ethnically incompetent. She believed that teachers have to be trained to be culturally sensitive to diverse populations.

Using descriptive statistical analysis, the comparison study compared the findings to determine if the original and the contemporary study showed any progress in teacher education programs being acceptable to train culturally knowledgeable teachers to work in culturally diverse communities. In interpreting the two studies, growth was shown in regards to teachers' attitudes about cultural diversity in education (Milner, Flowers, Moore, Moore III, & Flowers, 2003). Although the study indicates an increase in the need to be culturally responsive, research suggests that many beginning teachers have a low sense of efficacy when teaching students of diverse backgrounds (Carter, 2003). Efficacy among teachers is important because as Carter (2003) contends, efficacies along with expectations are characteristics which are associated with student achievement, especially in diverse classrooms.

Socialization

The school system plays an important role as an agent of socialization for our children. It is a key tool in building, and lowering our children's self-esteem. According to Kuykendall (1989), about 80% of African-American students have a positive self image when they enter school, 20% still maintain this image by the fifth grade. However, only 5% have a positive perception of themselves by their senior year. Unfortunately, African American students feel that academic achievement will not

improve their status. For African American students, especially those identified for gifted and talented education, there are many challenges related to identity and socialization in education. This includes having to use defense mechanisms that require negotiating oppositional cultural forces such as code switching.

Code switching, according to Celious and Oeperman (2001), is a practice that African Americans learn early in life. They suggest that it is a practice that causes individuals to alter their behavior patterns to conform to their current environment. To code switch is to choose the pattern of language appropriate to the context yet, with code switching, comes the criticism of acting White.

Fryer (2006) stated that the term “acting White” has reached a national awareness. The phrase has different connotations to different people and the interpretation varies as well. Generally speaking however, the term acting White is not unlike the derogatory Uncle Tom label. Although the concept of Blacks “acting White” has gone through several phases throughout the history of African Americans in the United States, the label of acting White still exists in American schools. It implies an abandoning of the African American identity and it is a social ill that is prevalent in some public schools and not in others. It is located in integrated public schools, not as common in private schools and predominately Black public schools (Fryer, 2006). Not all scholars define acting white in the same manner. According to Fryer (2006) most definitions of acting White include “a reference to situations where students of color adolescents ridicule their peers for engaging in behaviors perceived to be characteristic of whites” (p. 54). The concept of acting White is found to exist mainly in schools where

there is an overrepresentation of White students and underrepresentation of Black students in gifted and talented classes (Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005). In general, academically successful African American children are chastised for selling out to Whites and as Fordham and Ogbu (1986) explain:

School learning is therefore consciously or unconsciously perceived as a subtractive process: a minority who learns successfully in school or who follows the standard practices of school is perceived as becoming acculturated into the white American cultural frame of reference at the expense of the minorities' cultural frame of reference and welfare (pp. 182-183)

There is a social cost for high achieving adolescent males that have high grade point averages. The popularity of the group decreases as their GPA increases (Fryer, 2006). Further, there is often a trade-off between doing well and not being accepted by your peers when you come from a low achieving group. There is great peer-pressure which often results in underachievement (Ogbu, 2004). For example, African Americans who want to excel and make good grades are pressured by friends and peers from performing at the ability they are capable (Robinson-English, 2006). This is a particularly difficult challenge for African American males in gifted and talented programs as they seek to negotiate popularity, identity and friendship while balancing academic work.

High achieving Black male learners become social and academic outcasts in their own ethnic group when they are high achievers in school (Day-Vines, Patton, & Baytops 2003; Fryer, 2006). A possible solution that Fryer (2006) stated is that in the United States students of color are going to have to produce larger groups of high achievers.

This can be possible when more African American males are referred and accepted into GT programs.

As educators try to understand the complexities with students' cultural backgrounds, more gifted students of color will attain high academic achievement in the classroom (Ford, Howard, Harris, & Tyson, 2002). This is important especially when in regards to identity and identity development of African Americans and African American males in particular. While there is literature on African American cultural and identity development (Hughes & Bonner, 2006; Majors & Billson, 1992) there is little focus on identity development of gifted African American males.

This gap in the literature requires attention because it has significant implications for further insight into the underrepresentation of this cohort in gifted and talented education programs. According to Grantham and Ford (2003), racial identity development has an enormous impact on motivation, achievement, and attitudes towards school for gifted African American males. Given the problems highlighted in this research (African American achievement gap, African American over representation in special education and underrepresentation in gifted and talented education, and marginalization), it is also important to examine the role of teacher education programs.

Teacher Education Programs & Urban Education

In spite of scholarly research, volumes of publications, numerous educational reforms, there is considerable evidence that African American learners are still not achieving at the desired levels in public schools, especially in urban areas (Landsman & Lewis, 2006; Moore, 2003; Obiakor & Beachum, 2006; Robinson & Lewis, 2011;

Webb-Johnson & Carter, 2007). In addition to the achievement gap, African American students are over represented in special education (Donovan & Cross, 2002), face disciplinary actions more frequently than other students (Webb-Johnson, 2002) and are underrepresented in gifted and talented education initiatives and programs.

Teacher education programs are an integral component in the preparation of teachers for gifted and talented students. Their preparation, or their lack thereof, can negatively impact the gifted education process. If teachers have not been trained to examine and implement the guidelines for admission into these programs, or to teach culturally diverse students, there can be a perpetuation of negative stereotypes against them. Milner, Tenore and Laughter (2008) believe that culturally diverse male students are not included in current policies, procedures and practices in teacher education programs in the United States. The suggestions these researchers offer for teacher education programs are grounded in their research. The authors believe there are a small number of areas that can be addressed to enhance teachers' knowledge base in meeting the needs of cultural high achieving male students: a) teacher classroom experiences and b) guided field based experience. Teacher classroom experiences encourage teachers to read positive literature in regards to culturally high achieving male learners.

Reading the positive literature typically tends to outcast the negative media and stereotypes the teacher may have about this group. Providing core courses in teacher preparation programs that elaborate about the diversity of high achieving male learners could be an asset to the teacher preparation program; whereas, listing the course as an elective could possibly give teachers in the teacher preparation program an out not to

take the class which would expose teachers to cultural and multicultural issues in society.

Field based experiences are promoted so teachers in teacher preparation programs can reflect and discuss stereotypes in a constructive manner amongst their peers. Field based experiences give teachers a firsthand account of high achieving and giftedness in a classroom setting. The experiences in the teacher preparation program will enable teachers to be open minded when working with high achieving male learners and deconstruct their own biases of high achieving male learners.

Teacher education programs are encouraged to provide the tools necessary for teachers to approach teaching students with non conventional teaching methods as well as conventional teaching methods to reach the needs of high achieving male learners (Milner, Tenore and Laughter, 2008). As teachers think about race they should realize that all culturally diverse students do not learn the same way. In order for teachers to meet the needs of their students, teachers should develop skills and knowledge to reflect about their own experiences where race and the particulars of contexts are concerned (Milner, 2003). Irvine (2002) found African American teachers who use culturally-based diverse instructional strategies, positively influence academic success of African American students. Teacher education programs have a great responsibility to groom teachers for diverse classrooms.

There is still not a definite formula to prepare teachers to meet the needs of the diverse student population in education today. There is much uncertainty as to how the teacher population should be prepared to meets these students needs of culturally diverse

students. Teachers require skills which encompass cultural sensitivity and racial sensitivity to meet the needs associated with educating this population of culturally diverse students. According to Mattai, Wagle & Williams (2010), teacher preparation programs should include culturally diverse content and strategies to meet the needs of all students. The data is not limited to teacher preparation programs, teacher preparation programs should expose teachers to training in diverse communities. Training in diverse communities enables the teacher to get on the job training with students that are culturally diverse. The conjunction of data disseminated in teacher preparation programs and the exposure of working in diverse communities often will allow teachers to value other individual's cultures.

Qualified teachers are very valuable during the identification of gifted and talented students. Funding of gifted and talented education becomes irrelevant if there is inadequate training of teachers in gifted education. There is a great need to train teachers to identify gifted and talented students; however, most teacher preparation programs do not include any formal classes on gifted education. In-service training is not always mandated for teachers of gifted and talented students. Since most teacher preparation programs do not focus on gifted and talented education and in-service training on gifted education is not always required for those teachers who teach gifted education. There are a large number of teachers who are not professionally educated to teach gifted and talented education (National Association for Gifted Children, 2008-2009). For this reason, along with the inadequate preparation for teachers of diverse

students, there is a need to enhance teacher education programs by focusing on an element of multicultural education.

According to Johnston, Wetherill, High, H., & Greenebaum, H. (2002), teacher preparation programs that include exposure to cultural diversity and have a multicultural foundation represent the main element of the effective development of teachers of diverse students. This requires a shift in the design of traditional teacher education programs. Cater and Larke (1995) recommend training teachers with a specialized curriculum which would guide trainee teachers to become self reflective by examining how students construct knowledge through their own cultural experiences. In so doing, teachers can gain a multi-cultural perspective and develop a greater appreciation for the unique needs of their diverse students. This is critically important in the gifted and talented education field which has a severe underrepresentation of African American male students.

In addition to reviewing teacher perceptions and teacher education programs, in considering the context of the underrepresentation of African American males in gifted and talented education, it is equally important to review the state of the gifted and talented education field as a subset of the nation's educational system.

Teacher Training in Gifted Education

According to Lichtenwalter (2010) there have been prior studies that demonstrate a parallel of the amount of training received in gifted education by teachers to have a significant bearing on the identification of gifted and talented students. The appropriate training for teachers that teach gifted education is essential because as an educator

teachers should be able to interpret the needs of their gifted and talented students. The needs of gifted children in education vary from one classroom to the next and the teacher in the classroom of gifted children should be able to relate how different cultures value giftedness (Lichtenwalter, 2010). Teachers that receive proper training in gifted education demonstrate more support for gifted students and typically advocate for the needs of gifted students (Davison, 1996). There are a lot of optimistic outcomes that are the result of teacher training on giftedness such as curriculum is differentiated to meet the needs of the students and the techniques in which the content is delivered to the students is tailored for gifted instruction (Davison, 1996). Teachers of gifted students that receive proper training on gifted education encourage students to learn in and outside the classroom; these teachers encourage students to think outside the box.

Lichtenwalter (2010) stated there are various factors that can contribute to inadequate training of teachers in gifted education. Davison's (1996) research indicates that at times the inadequate teacher training of teachers in gifted education could lead back to the institution that recommends the teachers certification. Colleges and universities that recommend teachers for their certification are not the only methods that teachers can obtain gifted education training. Birdsall and Correa (2007) stated professional development opportunities should include the identification of gifted and talented students, and teacher training should not be exclusive to structured college courses.

Overview of Gifted and Talented Education in the US

This section presents an overview of Gifted and Talented Education in the United States. It starts with a synopsis of the variance in definitions of the concept of giftedness and the critiques associated with the way the definitions are conceptualized, especially as it relates to the suitability for African American males. The second section describes gifted and talented education from a national perspective followed by an overview of GT at the state and local level.

Defining the concept of giftedness is not a simple task. Suffice to say there are no agreed upon definitions of giftedness. The federal definition of giftedness stems from the Marland Report to Congress (1972) even though it has been amended several times. The National Association for Gifted Children (2010) (NAGC) in the frequently asked questions section of their website explain that the most recent definition is housed in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act and defines gifted students as:

Students, children, or youth who give evidence of high achievement capability in areas such as intellectual, creative, artistic, or leadership capacity, or in specific academic fields, and who need services and activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop those capabilities.

Overall, the definitions of giftedness vary according to the range of conservativeness attached to the definition.

In trying to understand the concept of giftedness and the way in which it is defined, consider the pendulum of conservativeness. The more conservative the definition, the greater the reliance on demonstrated performance on standardized tests—mostly IQ tests. Other more liberal definitions include other criteria that may not be measured using standardized or IQ assessments.

Critiques

Bonner (2001) found that the current definitions used for giftedness does not take into account the cultural history and learning methods of African American male students. With that, there needs to be recognition of specific psychological needs that teachers must address if they are to achieve academic success (Grantham, 2004a). With the traditional identification process for admission, based on conservative definitions of giftedness, African American students are placed at a significant disadvantage.

Importantly, teachers of gifted students must counteract the problem of addressing what is valued in one culture is not valued in another and embrace a more liberal definition of giftedness. It is only with the acceptance and application of these liberal definitions that the underrepresentation of African American males in gifted and talented programs can be adequately addressed. Addressing this problem can contribute to improving the outlook for African American males in the United States. In order to understand the overall picture of GT education programs in the United States, a clear overview of the funding associated with these programs is warranted.

Funding for Gifted and Talented Programs

The funding that is generated for gifted education programs is as essential as teacher preparation in the identification of gifted students in gifted education. Funding for these programs is scarce and displeasing in regards to gifted education in the United States. See Table 2.2. According to the National Association for Gifted Children (2009) for every hundred dollars spent on education, the federal government allocates a meager two cents to gifted students. Funding at the State level yields even more staggering

statistics. During the 2008-2009 academic school year gifted education was not supported with funds by 13 states. There is an excess of millions spent annually on education and 5 states allocated no more than \$1million on education programs for the gifted and talented programs, and 11 states spent a mere \$10 million or more. There are 32 states that mandate some level of gifted education, but only 6 of those states fund the mandate (National Association for Gifted Children, 2009). Not only do gifted education programs suffer from a severe lack of funds, they also experience frequent cuts from their tight budgets. Funding for GT programs is an important consideration for all GT education, even more so for urban schools and marginalized populations such as African American males.

Table 2.3***Funding Provided at State Level***

ALL DATA FROM 2010-2011 (unless otherwise noted)

STATE	FUNDING
Alabama	\$0 (2010-2011) \$0 (2009-2010)
Alaska	No data (2010-2011) No data (2009-2010)
Arizona	\$0 (2010-2011) \$640,000 (2009-2010)
Arkansas	\$20.7 million (2010-2011) \$20.2 million (2009-2010)
California	\$44.2 million (2010-2011) \$44.2 million (2009-2010)
Colorado	\$9.1 million (2010-2011) \$9.0 million (2009-2010)
Connecticut	\$0 (2010-2011) \$0 (2009-2010)
Delaware	general education funds based on unit count (2010-2011) general education funds based on unit count (2009-2010)
D.C.	2010-2011 No Information Available
Florida	\$267 million (2010-2011) No Information Available (2009-2010, 2008-2009, 2007-2008, 2006-2007)
Georgia	\$302 million (2010-2011) \$260 million (2009-2010)
Guam	Pay the teachers salary (2010-2011) Pay the teachers salary (2009-2010)
Hawaii	\$0 (2010-2011) \$0 (2009-2010)
Idaho	\$1,000,000 (2008-2009) \$1,000,000 (2007-2008)
Illinois	\$0 (2010-2011) \$0 (2009-2010)
Indiana	\$12,500,000 (2010-2011) \$13,000,000 (2009-2010)
Iowa	\$34.8 million (2010-2011) \$34.3 million (2009-2010)

Table 2.3 Continued

Kansas	\$11 million (2010-2011) \$10.9 million (2009-2010)
Kentucky	\$6.6 million (2010-2011) \$6.7 million (2009-2010)
Louisiana	\$65.7 million (2010-2011) \$59.1 million (2009-2010)
Maine	\$4.8 million (2010-2011) \$4.4 million (2009-2010)
Maryland	\$0 (2010-2011) \$0 (2009-2010)
Massachusetts	\$0 (2010-2011) \$0 (2009-2010)
Michigan	\$0 (2010-2011) \$0 (2009-2010)
Minnesota	\$11,377,000 (2010-2011) \$11,365,000 (2009-2010)
Mississippi	No data (2010-2011) No data (2009-2010)
Missouri	\$0 (2010-2011) \$0 (2009-2010)
Montana	\$250,000 (2010-2011) \$250,000 (2009-2010)
Nebraska	\$2,300,000 (2010-2011) \$2,300,000 (2009-2010)
Nevada	No Information Available
New Hampshire	\$5,000 (2010-2011) \$5,000 (2009-2010)
New Jersey	No data (2010-2011) No data (2009-2010)
New Mexico	No data (2010-2011) No data (2009-2010)
New York	No data (2010-2011) No data (2009-2010)
North Carolina	\$68,067,940 (2010-2011) \$66,985,569 (2009-2010)
North Dakota	No data (2008-2009) No data (2007-2008)
Ohio	\$68,990,933 (2010-2011) \$55,604,857 (2009-2010)
Oklahoma	\$51,654,946 (2010-2011) \$53,481,523 (2009-2010)

Table 2.3 Continued

Oregon	\$330,000 (2010-2011) \$106,953 (2009-2010)
Pennsylvania	\$0 (2010-2011) \$0 (2009-2010)
Rhode Island	No data collected in 2010
South Carolina	\$26,628,246 (2010-2011) \$26,628,246 (2009-2010)
South Dakota	No data (2010-2011) No data (2009-2010)
Tennessee	Not collected (2010-2011) Not collected (2009-2010)
Texas	\$137,724,874 (2010-2011) \$134,427,247 (2009-2010)
Utah	\$3,494,781 (2010-2011) \$3,494,781 (2009-2010)
Vermont	\$0 (2008-2009) \$0 (2007-2008)
Virginia	\$44,697,913 (2010-2011) \$44,987,462 (2009-2010)
Washington	\$9,137,000 (2010-2011) \$9,189,000 (2009-2010)
West Virginia	No data (2010-2011, 2009-2010, 2008-2009, 2007-2008, 2006-2007)
Wisconsin	\$263,500 (2010-2011) \$263,500 (2009-2010)
Wyoming	\$2,573,536 (2010-2011) \$2,551,790 (2009-2010)

National Association For Gifted Children, 2008
<http://www.nagc.org/DataMapbyState.aspx>

The State of African American Males in the US

Although history of the United States reveals that education in America was predominantly a male institution, by the early 1980's women's participation rates in college exceeded male participation. Over the past several decades, the percentage of men in US colleges and universities has slipped to 44% of the undergraduate population (Fonda, 2000) with an increasing gender gap across the nation. Although men from all ethnic groups are now a marginal group in higher education, African American males are proportionally the least represented (Becker & Becker, 2003; Bedsworth, Colby & Doctor, 2006). This has had a significant effect on the state of African American males' lives and prospects.

Today, Black men are disproportionately incarcerated in contrast to males from other races, representing only about 6% of the overall population but over 40% of the prison population (Bedsworth, Colby & Doctor, 2006). There are more Black males in prison than there are Black males in higher education (Gordon, 1999). As expected, the situation is even more problematic for African American males living in inner cities. According to records from the Federal Public Defenders Office (2007), in inner cities, one half of Black men had not finished high school and by their mid-30's, 30% of Black men with no more than high school education, had already been imprisoned. If that was not bad enough, the statistics are worse for high-school dropouts. Unfortunately, 60% of Black high school dropouts have served time in prison. High dropout rates among urban African American males are directly related to school suspensions and arrests (Children's Defense Fund, 2007; Noguera & Wing, 2006). In today's competitive

society, a high school dropout is much more likely than a college graduate to be unemployed. In a recent report, Toldson and Lewis (2012) explained some grim statistics for this population.

A number of scholars who study African American males use Critical Race Theory as a frame to understand social conditions of Black males. One exemplar is Duncan (2002a; 2002b) who used CRT to study the inequalities in education which affect Black males. Duncan places race at the core of his theorizing of racial domination in urban education research. In fact, the main finding of his article is the illustration of how CRT can highlight bold as well as subtle forms of racial oppression in the US and in urban schools in particular. Trends of high dropout rates, unemployment, underemployment, and minimum wage earnings for Blacks reflect the long term effect of the achievement gap (Jacobson, Olsen, Rice, Sweetland & Ralph, 2011). High school dropouts are likely to earn 60% less than their college educated counterpart; they are more likely to be in poorer health and are 2.5 times more likely to be arrested (Bedsworth, Colby, & Doctor, 2006). The concerns over the Black males lack of social mobility and their overall plight has received much attention in scholarly literature (Allen, 1992; Becker & Becker, 2003; Brown & Davis, 2001; Cook, 1998; Delpit, 1996; Kunjufu, 1984; Weatherspoon, 2005; Whiting, 2006b). There are several inherent obstacles to success for African American males in today's society.

Some of the insurmountable obstacles include an inferior public education, absence of African American role models, negative perceptions and expectations from teachers, and the tendency to drop out of high school (Allen, 1992; Allen, 2000; Astin

1984; Becker & Becker, 2003; Cross, 1991; Maxwell, 2004). The absence of Black males in higher education creates great concern for the nation socially, economically, educationally, and culturally (Cook, 1998). These challenges are part of the vicious cycle that helps perpetuate the problem of underrepresentation of African American males in gifted and talented education in the United States.

The State of African American Males in GT Programs in the US

In the United States, there is a long standing severe underrepresentation of students of color (except Asian Americans) in every traditional measure of academic achievement, including GPA, class rank, and standardized test scores (Miller, 2004). These statistics reveal that these groups are not represented in the top 1%, 5%, and even top 25% (College Board, 2003a). The underrepresentation for African American males has not decreased in recent years and this is relevant to the discussion in the context of this paper.

To develop a broad understanding of the state of gifted and talented education in the United States, it is important to address why educating gifted and talented youth is important. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education (2009), with the high dropout rate about \$300 billion in potential earnings will be lost. It is imperative especially as the nation faces steep competition and difficult economic times, that the United States improves the number of graduates and especially graduates in Science, technology and Mathematics (STEM). In order to remain competitive in the global economy, more students need to pursue studies in these fields. With that in mind, gifted and talented students need to be encouraged to achieve their full potential.

The Statistics

In 2006, gifted and talented students made up 6.7% (3,236,990) of the US population of elementary and secondary students (U.S. Department of Education, 2008a). Of that population, only 3.6% were Black students (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b). In Texas, the numbers were not much different. Gifted and talented students made up 7.6% (367,873) of the population of elementary and secondary students (Academic Excellence Indicator System, 2010) and only 4.4% of these students were African American (U.S. Department of Education, 2008a). While the national reports did not delineate the breakdown by ethnicity and gender as a combined category, males are underrepresented in this field and the disproportion is even greater for African American males. Gifted and Talented students in the district which this study took place make up 4.5% (2,829) of the elementary and secondary students.

Gifted and Talented Education in Texas

There is an infantile historical aspect of Gifted and Talented Programs in the State of Texas. The formation of GT Programs in this state was established in 1977 with the assistance of the Texas Legislature. In 1979, the Texas Legislature provided funds for GT Programs but it was optional if school districts in the State of Texas complied with offering the services. The Texas Legislature, in 1987, no longer gave school districts the option to provide GT Services for the students of Texas; with the passing of new legislation it became mandatory to comply with the new legislation. In an effort to continually strive to make improvements for Gifted and Talented Programs in Texas, the Texas State Plan for the Education/Gifted Talented Students was formed in 1990 by the

Texas State Board of Education (SBOE). The goal for students, according to the Texas State Plan as developed by the State of Texas is:

Students who participate in services designed for gifted/talented students will demonstrate skills in self-directed learning, thinking, research, and communication as evidenced by the development of innovative products and performances that reflects individuality and creativity and are advanced in relation to students of similar age, experience or environment. High school graduates who have participated in services for gifted/talented students will have produced products and performances of professional quality as part of their program services (Texas State Plan, 2009, p. 1).

Gifted and Talented Education in Knowledge ISD

Knowledge Independent School District (Pseudonym) is in compliance with the State of Texas mandates for Gifted and Talented Programs (GT). Students can be identified in this district in grades K-12 in Math and Reading/Language Arts for the GT program. Social Studies and Science programs are available for students starting in the fourth grade. Admission into the GT program requires qualifying in one of the core subject areas.

There are several phases in the admission process to the GT program in this district. One component of the admission process requires students to develop a high quality project that demonstrates their ability in their respective GT program(s). The project produced ought to exhibit the good quality and extensive coverage of subject matter and the technique that is delivered in K-12 instruction and curriculum. The District's GT Program, on a routine basis, examines the goal of how the students' needs are being met. Upon the completion of the GT program, the students graduate with the honor of a *Distinguished Achievement Plan*. Graduating on this plan, the students are

college ready as they would have taken various college level classes while attending high school.

Gifted and Talented programs are offered at traditional schools as well as magnet schools in the school district. All students of the district have equal access to GT programs in this district. The scope and sequence utilized in this district allows all students to be a success academically in GT programs. There are six school districts that received recognition by the State of Texas from The Texas Education Agency, and Knowledge Independent School District was one of the six school districts (Encounters, 2009).

EXCEL Program

The State of Texas is required by the legislature to afford all students in kindergarten through the 12th grade with the suitable tools to be prosperous in GT programs. According to Encounters (2009) Knowledge Independent School District is in compliance with guidelines and regulations set by the Texas Education Agency. The State of Texas has mandates set forth by the Texas Education Agency in regards to gifted education; however, it is up to the local school districts in Texas to develop the gifted education program for each district. The guiding principles set forth by the State of Texas are to support area school districts in Texas with compliance guidelines. The compliance guidelines are set in place to assist Texas school districts with providing appropriate services for the gifted population (Encounters, 2009).

Knowledge Independent School Districts gifted and talented programs are a result of the Texas Education Agency's Guidelines for Gifted and Talented Programs.

The 1991 Texas Mandate for gifted and talented programs was the root of the commitment for gifted and talented programs in Texas (Encounters, 2009). Various strategies are utilized in the Knowledge Independent School District's EXCEL program to promote the success of the districts culturally diverse population of gifted students.

Knowledge Independent School District established its gifted and talented program over 35 years ago. The school district has always focused on identifying gifted and talented students during the early years of their education (Encounters, 2009). Originally, when the gifted and talented program was created language arts and mathematics were the only core subject areas used to identify and screen for gifted education. Since the inception of the GT program science and social studies have been included as identification subject areas. According to Encounters (2009) the six steps that were established as part of the admittance into the Gifted and Talented Program in Knowledge Independent School District are: 1. nomination, 2. identification by multiple criteria, 3. screening, 4. building committee review/placement in the program, 5. re-nomination and the appeal process are used if necessary.

Identifying gifted and talented students in Knowledge consist of the following three stages: (a) nomination, (b) screening and (c) selection. Admittance into the GT program can come from a variety of nominations from persons such as teachers, librarian, counselors, parents, principal, community members, self-nominations, and student nominations (Encounters, 2009). Admission into the GT program is permissible for students at any time in their K-12 academic deeds. The identification process is ongoing in the GT program; therefore, if the initial screening process is missed because

a student is not registered or a transfers in from another school district from a GT program, this process allows for admittance into the GT program at a later date and time (Encounters, 2009).

Students that are evaluated for the EXCEL program in Knowledge will have certain measures assessed during the selection process. There are various measures of assessment such as subjective and objective assessments as well as assessments performed as a group or individually (Encounters, 2009). Assessment measures come from a vast array of measurements such as IQ tests, academic tests, achievement tests, tests that appraise creativeness, teacher nominations, students grades, examinations that measure cognitive ability, self-nomination scales for students, student interviews, nomination of parents and peer scales, portfolios that exhibit a product, and leadership rating scales (Encounters, 2009). Knowledge ISD is diligent in regards that all subgroups such as racial, culturally diverse, ethnic/minority groups, economically disadvantaged students, students with physical handicaps, stereotyping by gender, students with disruptive conduct in the classroom and students with high and low energy levels are identified for gifted and talented programs in the district (Encounters, 2009).

Placement is made by a committee for final selection into the GT program in Knowledge ISD. An integral component for the gifted and talented program is the committee; they evaluate selection and placement in the GT program (Encounters, 2009). The committee comprehends the guidelines set forth by Knowledge ISD and the State of Texas and strives to meet the needs of the students and the gifted and talented program. According to Encounters (2009) the committee may include members such as a

teacher, diagnostician, a school administrator, pathologist, or counselor. The building committee can be any combination of the above members and fulfill the requirement of being a committee member (Encounters, 2009). The committee screens and places students in Knowledge I.S.D.; however, the committee is also responsible for observing current students in the EXCEL program to confirm their placement in the GT program is suitable for the learner.

The EXCEL program in Knowledge I.S.D. is a voluntary process for student participation which requires the students' parent or legal guardian written permission. According to Encounters (2009) not all students are selected for the EXCEL program; however, the student has the choice to reapply for the program at a later time. If the student chooses to reapply for the gifted and talented program they have a six month waiting period before they can reapply. The waiting period of six months allows the committee to monitor the student's academic success (Encounters, 2009). The committee's decision in regards to placement in the gifted and talented programs in Knowledge I.S.D. can be appealed by a parent or guardian.

Summary

This chapter has presented an in-depth review of literature relevant to the issue of African American males underrepresentation in gifted and talented education programs in the United States. It examined issues related to White racism and domination and provides an overview of the educational landscape with relation to teacher and student demographics. The chapter also discussed reasons for the underrepresentation and provided specific statistics based on the national context.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to explore and interpret the life experiences and educational practices of five teachers of African American males in gifted and talented programs in urban secondary schools. This study is interested in broadening the discussion of gifted education for African American males and the voices of teachers of this population of students are not adequately represented in the academic literature.

This chapter outlines the methodology that will be used for the study. It describes the theoretical paradigms that will guide the collection and analysis of the data. The first half of the chapter presents the research design and methodological rationale while the second half proposes the methods to be used for data collection, management and analysis.

Research Design and Methodological Approach

The primary concern in this study is the life experiences and educational practices of five teachers of African American males in gifted and talented programs in urban secondary schools. The philosophical foundation underlying the nature of the research problem determines the methodology or methodological approach to be used for this study. The research questions that guided the study were:

The following three research questions guided the study:

1. How do teachers describe factors that promote achievement with African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs?

2. How do the life experiences of teachers influence their advocacy for African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs?
3. How do Gifted and Talented teachers of African American males participate in and influence identification and referrals of African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs?

Given that the study was interested in hearing the personal stories (narratives) of these five teachers as they relate to their life experiences and their educational practices, a naturalistic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) approach was most appropriate. Narrative is defined by Denzin and Lincoln (2005) as:

Oral or written and may be elicited or heard during fieldwork, an interview or a naturally occurring conversation. In any of these situations, a narrative may be (a) a short topical story about a particular event and specific characters such as an encounter with a friend, boss, or doctor; (b) an extended story about a significant aspect of one's life such as schooling, work, marriage, divorce, childbirth, an illness, a trauma, or participation in a war or social movement; or (c) a narrative one's entire life, from birth to the present. (p. 652)

With a naturalistic inquiry method, the research occurs in real world settings using interviews made up of open-ended questions. The methodology employed in this study is qualitative in nature and design.

Merriam (1998) explained that qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry (p. 5). Further, Merriam and Associates (2002), documented eight approaches to conducting qualitative research; these are basic interpretive, phenomenology, grounded theory, case study, ethnography, narrative analysis, critical, and postmodern-post structural. Based on the research purpose and questions, a narrative analysis is most useful for the purposes of this research study.

Consequently, this approach is essential to exploring and interpreting the stories of the five teachers of gifted and talented African American students in a secondary urban school setting.

With this in mind, the research explored two main components of the participants' stories: a) the content—what is being told and b) the structure—how the story is being told. During the interviews, emphasis was centered on how the participants view their life and realities, particularly as to how they relate to their educational experiences, as well as how they articulate them. In fact, the data analysis was done during data collection and not after all the data was collected. The research was inductive in its efforts to learn about the individuals' experiences and how these influence their experiences and educational practices as teachers of gifted and talented African American learners. Because observations were done in these teachers' classrooms, the notes taken from the observations were analyzed and compared with the notes from these interviews in search of corroborations and contradictions, as well as a general impression of their educational practices.

Site Selection

It is important to select an appropriate site for a naturalistic research project as it is central to a study's viability (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993). Along with the physical environment, the setting must be comfortable and familiar for the participants (Patton, 2002). Marshall and Rossman (1989) provided specific principles for selecting a site, notably:

- (a) entry is possible; (b) there is a high probability that a rich mix of many of the processes, people, programs, interactions, or structures that may be a part of the

research question will be present; (c) the researcher can devise an appropriate role to maintain continuity of presence for as long as necessary; and (d) data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured by avoiding poor sampling decisions (p. 55).

This research study was conducted in a large southwestern major metropolitan city in the United States. The district holds full accreditation from the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The site was selected because it was noted as a district with an underrepresentation of Gifted and Talented African American students.

The area includes 111 square miles of land and is the 11th largest school district in the state. With over 62,500 students and over 8,600 employees, there are approximately 28,138 secondary school students. The demographic breakdown for the student population is as follows: 1,867 (3.0 percent) White students, 41,831 (66.9 percent) Hispanic students, 17,724 (28.3 percent) African American students, 44 (0.1) and Native American, 1,066 (1.7 percent) Asian/Pacific Islander students. In the district, 53,267 (85.2 percent) of the student population were considered economically disadvantaged and qualified for free or reduced lunch. Student enrollment in GT education programs total 2,829 (4.5 percent) compared to 367,873 (7.6 percent) for the state (Texas Education Agency, 2009-2010).

Sample Selection

Sampling techniques in qualitative research are important for purposes of credibility, richness, and data quality. Purposeful sampling was useful since the aim is to find out, uncover, or analyze information obtained from a sample that is knowledgeable or competent in a certain field or area (Merriam, 2009). Patton (2002) believes:

the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich* cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term *purposeful* sampling (p. 230, emphasis in original).

In addition, purposeful sampling allowed me to select the participants and the location of study because the selected participants can purposefully address the research problem (Creswell, 2007).

From the overall population of 56 (1.3 percent) gifted and talented teachers in the district, five teachers were interviewed. These participants were selected from a single, culturally diverse, secondary school in an urban school district. Pseudonyms were given to each participant to protect his or her identity and to maintain anonymity. Along with purposeful sampling, criterion sampling techniques were also used. The participants were selected based on a set of pre-determined criteria of relevance and importance (Creswell, 1998). According to Merriam (1998) criterion sampling is useful as it helps enhance understanding and developing insight into issues that are critical to a study.

To ensure the participants were able to speak from a place of experience and credibility to address the research questions, they were each required to meet the following criteria: (a) Have experience teaching Gifted and Talented students for at least three years, (b) Have experience teaching for at least five years, (c) Current on GT professional development hours, (d) Teach a core class: Math, Science, English or History.

Data Collection

The most widely used method of data collection in all kinds of qualitative research is interviews. The main source of data collection will be through audio recorded

open-ended interviews (Patton, 2002), conducted in a face-to-face format at the participant's site of preference. These interviews were done in conjunction with an interview guide (See Appendix A) but the questions were not asked in the same way nor will they be asked in the same order. The interview guide was designed to address the overarching research questions, the purpose of the study, and was informed by the conceptual framework and other concepts from the literature.

The narrative interview questions were crafted based on the overall research questions (Briggs, 1986). Interview questions also probed for issues related to participant demographics (age, gender and ethnicity) and background (educational and socio-economic), and they allowed participants the opportunity to express themselves on other matters related to the questions and subject as they deemed fit. Since there is not a standard form to the use of narrative as a research tool, I established a climate that allowed the interview participants to tell their stories. Interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, and coded for emergent and recurring themes.

In addition to conducting interviews, documents were collected and analyzed throughout the research process. These included state and national reports dealing with Gifted and Talented Education Programs. Additionally, classroom observations using Webb-Hasan and Hassan's (2009) Culturally Responsive Learning Engagement Protocol (See Appendix B) were done. The observations which lasted between 45-50 minutes each, were useful and appropriate in the study as qualitative researchers often rely on observing directly as a core form of inquiry (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Specifically, these classroom observations using the Culturally Responsive Learning Engagement

(CRLE) protocol required a systematic noting and recording of classroom interactions, behaviors and artifacts in the specific setting of the study--the GT classroom. All data sets (interviews, observations and documents) were triangulated, critically assessed for alignments, corroborations, as well as contradictions throughout the data.

Data Analysis and Management

There are many ways in which data can be analyzed in a research study. According to Creswell (2003), data analysis and interpretation is a process where data is primed for analysis. In a qualitative research study, data analysis is not linear in that data analysis does not asynchronously occur after data collection (Merriam, 2009) but is done concurrently (Merriam, 1998; Creswell, 2007). During each interview, I took very detailed notes based on what was said during the interview. This is because in narrative interviewing, the goal was to seek detailed accounts as opposed to brief statements (Riessman, 2008). At the conclusion of the interviews I revisited what was said during the interview while rewriting my notes to describe the interview session.

With handwritten consent from the participants, each interview was recorded with a digital tape recorder. The tape recording allowed me to maintain the reliability of the information obtained during the interview; I was able to compare the recording to my handwritten notes. The recording was played over and over again for clarity on any given issue during the interview. I transcribed handwritten and digital audio recorded interviews.

For the interview data, a thematic analysis was useful to analyze the way in which the participants make meaning of their professional and educational experiences

as they teach Gifted and Talented African American students. Analyzing the narratives from the interviews showed how the participants structure their descriptions to make sense of their stories (Riessman, 1993). The classroom observations involved a hybrid analysis as the CRLE protocol provided structure for the observations, but it also allowed for more detailed notation of behavior and events observed in the GT classroom with each of the five participants. The classroom observation offered an opportunity for immersion and the opportunity to learn from the actual observational experience and to make personally reflective notes. According to Glesne (1999) personal reflections are integral to the analysis of a cultural group--in this case, the teachers of African American male GT students. While data analysis started during the interviewing process, it was formally completed in three main stages.

Stage One - Transcribing

The first step after interviewing was transcribing the audio from the recorded interviews. All transcripts were, as best as possible, transcribed verbatim. After confirming that the transcription data from each interview are accurate, a profile of each participant was created.

Stage Two- Profiling and Observation Profile

To develop a true understanding of the participants in the study, a profile or case story, of each of the five participants, which presents a short narrative of the participant's history and experience, was created. Each profile presents information related to who they are, their educational background, and other relevant personal information. Profiles of the classroom observations follow the participant observations.

These were based on profiles collected using the Culturally Responsive Learning Engagement Protocol. The purpose of the profiles is to provide an introduction to the individual participants making it easier to relate to the whole person when analyzing interview data. The classroom observation offers insight into the participants' class.

Stage Three- Narrative Analysis

The third and final stage of the data analysis occurred mostly after the case stories were prepared and the transcriptions were verified. The data collected was analyzed by narrative analysis. Narrative means many things to many people and this is how narrative can be used in many different disciplines. Narrative involves working in social sciences in first-person; this is an account of the participants lived experience in regards to a research project. Regardless of the account of the lived experience being told by the participant, the stories are linked by events and thoughts (Riessman, 2008). For the purpose of this research, narrative analysis involved shaping the responses that I received from my research participants in regards to the underrepresentation of African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs.

Narrative can be an integral component in research because of its social interaction and in this instance, narrative gave the research participants the opportunity to tell their story so their voices can be heard, specifically as it relates to their experiences and educational practices in teaching GT African American males. In conjunction with the analysis of the narrative text from the interviews, the notes from the Culturally Responsive Learning Engagement Protocol were analyzed and as themes and patterns emerged from all methods of data collection, whether interviews, documents or

observations they were compared among each other for corroboration and contradictions.

The overall process for the narrative analysis effectively and more formally began after the case stories were prepared for each participant and after the data from the transcribed interviews were carefully reviewed and member checked. A master copy of each transcript was printed and filed with the securely locked away data.

To begin the unitizing process, I used the information from the interview notes as the starting point for assigning tentative themes. As I read each interview transcript, using my earlier crude analysis as a guide, I started to divide the text into meaning units. The unitized chunks of data were color coded with highlighters, each according to the tentative themes identified in the interviewing process. The same was done for each of the observational notes based on the CRLE protocol.

Based on the identified themes from the transcripts as well as the CRLE protocol notes, I assigned each theme a representative color. Next, each transcript and each set of classroom observation notes were reviewed and compared for matching meaning units. Additionally, a matrix was prepared of each of the interview questions and the individual responses from the participants. This process of organizing the data helped facilitate data management particularly for the next step of categorizing.

As the data from the transcripts and the observations were being reviewed and manipulated, I underlined key words, concepts and descriptions. From these, other themes and patterns of ideas, concepts, behaviors, interactions, and or language emerged and were noted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Sections of seemingly unrelated text from each

transcript were placed in a miscellaneous category for later review. The process of sorting and categorizing was repeated, allowing room for subcategories or amendments to the initial organization and for new themes to be assigned. The process was repeated to make sure all the data were accounted for and classified appropriately. Managing the data is an important component of the research process. All data are securely stored in locked cabinets. Data and consent forms will be kept on file for three years after completion of the study. All data and findings will be always be presented anonymously.

Trustworthiness of the Data

Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose that the use of the audit trail will substantiate research conclusions in this study. In order to preserve the integrity of the research, I kept a record of all steps, procedures, decisions, issues or problems that arose during the study. This extended as far as data collection through to data analysis. In this study, ethical practices were evident during the entire research process. I notified (in writing) to all participants that they will have a right to privacy during the research process, confidentiality during and after the study, and the participants were knowledgeable of all dealings with the study. Merriam (2009) —Although policies, guidelines, and codes of ethics have been developed by the federal government, institutions, and professional associations, actual ethical practice comes down to the individual researcher's own values and ethics" (p. 230).

Although I made every reasonable effort to minimize personal biases, the philosophy of qualitative research recognizes and appreciates the influence of the researcher on the participants and vice versa (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Given the

subjectivity embedded in qualitatively designed research studies, trustworthiness of the data becomes even more crucial. Trustworthiness refers to the quality of the investigation that made the research findings significant. The trustworthiness or quality of this research was ensured through triangulation and member checks.

Triangulation

Numerous data gathering techniques (interviews, observations and documents) were used to ensure triangulation in this study. Triangulation is a multi-method approach (Maxwell, 2005) that strengthens a study (Patton, 2002) and offers credibility. It shows an effort to secure an in-depth understanding of the research problem. It is considered a strategy that adds rigor and depth (Flick, 2002) to the inquiry. By using notes from observations, documents on overall GT funding and demographics as well as interview data, triangulation was ensured throughout the study.

Member Checking

Respondent validation (Schwandt, 2007) which is also known as member checking is another strategy that was used to enhance the credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of this study. It was also used to increase internal validity (Merriam, 2009). Maxwell (2005) described the importance of member checking this way:

This is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on, as well as being an important way of identifying your own biases and misunderstanding of what you observed (p. 111).

For member checking, the participants were asked to comment on and verify my interpretation of the data to ensure accuracy of interpretation and trustworthiness. Member checks were consistently done throughout the course of the study. Importantly,

as the interviews are transcribed, I contacted each of the participants to ask them to verify the transcriptions. Because I used member checks throughout the research process and to verify the transcriptions, the participants were able to hear their “voice” within my interpretation of their individual stories. This also provided me with the opportunity to assess and make the appropriate changes during the research process.

Transferability

Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained transferability this way:

the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere. The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can and do” (p. 298).

What transferability means to the researcher is that whoever reads the study has the ability to assess whatever is learned in one circumstance and that it can be transferred to like situations when the individual comes across those conditions. Transferability happens in our everyday lives even if we are not aware of it occurring (Merriam, 2009). A goal of this study was that individuals would be able to apply transferability when reading the findings from the study.

It is my hope that any person that reads my study about the underrepresentation of African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs, and the experiences of the teachers of GT African American males will be able to transfer what my study says and apply it to their own circumstances.

Dependability and Confirmability

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) looked at the terms dependability and confirmability as an alternate for the standard positivist criteria which used the terms reliability and

objectivity. During the data collection, the research will be confirmed to evaluate if the findings will be beneficial to what society knows to date about the underrepresentation of African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs in the United States. All research data such as digital recorded interviews, handwritten notes from interviews, journals and other essential research data relating to this research will be maintained by me to show confirmability. All research information requested will be granted to the participants upon request.

Positionality

It is of critical importance that as the researcher I declare my positionality because it is impossible, as the researcher and primary research instrument (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993), to remain unbiased throughout the research process. The researcher is the key instrument in a qualitative study. This process can best be explained by Merriam (2009) who highlights distinctive qualities of qualitative research as “the focus is on understanding the meaning of experience, the researcher is the primary instrument in data collection and analysis, the process is inductive, and rich description characterizes the end product” (p. 19).

In order to acquire the desired information, as the investigator, I will have to relinquish control during the interview process and follow the participants’ lead. This is partly due to the fact that open ended questions will offer valuable insight allowing participants to construct responses that are of value to them.

My journey to the classroom came by way of a career change. After I received my degree in business and working in banking for several years, I was prompted to make

a career change. I decided on a career as a teacher, helping students learn and applying principles of business would be fulfilling. After the transition, I continued my education and received a Masters in counseling. Several years after receiving my Masters, I decided to enroll in a doctoral program. Having my own children coupled with my interest in being a better advocate for them in school lead to my research topic.

On my quest to find my research interest for my dissertation, I changed several times, toggling back and forth with various topics. The determining factor was something one of my professors told me several years ago. My research topic needed to be something I was passionate about, a topic so powerful that when I thought I had nothing left to give, I still found the passion to write. I found my passion during the first two years my son attended elementary school. His school has a predominately Hispanic population, in an Urban School District. The school had one gifted and talented class per grade level. My son was the only African American male in his kindergarten and first grade gifted and talented classrooms. Both his kindergarten and first grade teachers were European American females under 25 years of age. While on the surface this might not present a problem, my son's first two years of school were full of suspense.

My son was identified and placed in the gifted program in kindergarten. At the time I thought this was rather strange because I wondered how wise it would be to place a child who is only in kindergarten in a gifted and talented program. In any event, his kindergarten year went well, he excelled in his class work and the only behavior issues we had with him were the typical five year old behaviors challenges.

Probably the biggest challenge we had with him then and even now is the fact that he wants to be first to complete all assignments in the classroom. The typical concerns expressed by his teacher were that he pouted a lot, he wanted to be first at everything in the classroom, and that he would get upset when other students in the classroom had incorrect answers. She would indicate in his daily folder when he expressed those types of behaviors in classroom, and we communicated about how we could address those issues. Overall my son's kindergarten year in public school was a success.

The beginning of his first grade year was off to a great start. My son would receive excellent or satisfactory marks every day in class for his academic performance. The first grade teacher had similar concerns about him wanting to be first at everything in the classroom, and he would generally get upset if he did not do extremely well on assignments in the classroom. In the Fall of first grade, my son started getting marks that indicated there was a need for improvement in conduct, more descriptive notes started coming home and his teacher started calling home three to four days per week describing his behavior in the classroom. The comments would come home as notes. When we received phone calls we would discuss the concerns of the teacher with my son. This went on from about November to February before the situation escalated.

Early one morning shortly after school has began; my son was referred to the office for disciplinary problems. My husband and I, both educators, noticed he was being referred for an accumulation of offenses. We were greeted by an assistant principal with a very negative attitude. The items indicated on the referral were

disruptive behaviors by anyone's account; our concern was the referral including every infraction that occurred during the school year. We expressed to the assistant principal that we did not approve of any misbehavior but were concerned our son was bored and not receiving enough instruction in the class to keep him engaged. We were unable to speak to his teacher until an appointment was set, my son received an ~~in~~ school suspension". When we were able to meet with the teacher, the counselor and the administrator, we expressed our concerns regarding classroom management. The administrator became defensive but retreated when confronted on the issue. We ended the meeting with me expressing my concern that a paper trail was being created in order to refer my son to special education. I was assured that was not the case however; I left the meeting knowing I would have to remain an advocate for my son as an African American in a gifted program.

Summary

This chapter described the methodological procedures that were used in this research study. As a qualitative study, the primary source of data was from interviews and secondary sources included national and state reports related to Gifted and Talented African American students as well as classroom observations.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to identify, examine and interpret the philosophy, ideology, and educational practices of five teachers of African American males in gifted and talented programs in an urban secondary school. The following research questions guided the study: (a) How do teachers describe factors that promote achievement with African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs? (b) How do the life experiences of teachers influence their advocacy for African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs? (c) How do Gifted and Talented teachers of African American males participate in and influence identification and referrals of African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs

This chapter is organized into four main sections with each section culminating with a summary of that section. First the section presents a description of the school where each teacher is employed. Second, a case story or profile of each participant--five teachers of African American male gifted and talented students in an urban secondary school--follows. This profile section includes a graphic presentation of the teachers' demographic background including their age ranges, educational background, teaching experience and their ethnicity (See Table 4.1). This section is followed by the participant observation profiles, which includes data collected from classroom observations.

Third, the major themes and subthemes are identified from the interviews and classroom observations are highlighted. The 4 major themes include: (a) Making Cultural Connections, with subthemes: (1) Curriculum (2) Pedagogy and (3) Building

relationships with students (b) Determined to Make a Difference (c) Multiple Means of Identifying and (d) Biased and Unequal, with subtheme: (1) Behavior Challenges. In this section, actual words or direct quotes are used to provide a rich representation of the ideas and themes herein. Additionally, the research questions were addressed through the interview responses as well as through data gathered through observations. The fourth and final section of this chapter presents a summary of the study's overall findings as they specifically relate to the major research questions.

An Overview of the Urban Middle School

The tone of the school's philosophy and ideology, that is, the positive environment it exemplifies is based on the philosophy and ideology of the two individuals for whom the school was named. The tenth middle school in this urban school district was dedicated after two educationalists, husband and wife who gave at least four decades of service in countless capacities to the students in this urban school district. The history of the naming of the school is intriguing. Remarkably, the twosome was flabbergasted at a board meeting when the recommendation was given to name the school after the couple, because they assumed was they were at the board meeting to honor another acquaintance and colleague. Minutes of the board meeting suggest that they were so ecstatic with sentiments and happiness with such an honor they could barely express themselves. The couple always referred to themselves as humble educators working for the students in this urban school district.

The husband's professional career in the school district covered an array of positions. His career began as a teacher at one of the district's high schools. He

continued to progress professional in his career and served the students in this urban district in an array of positions. After he taught, his career progressed in the following manner: assistant principal, principal, executive director of secondary schools, area superintendent of a high school and he finished his career as assistant superintendent of administration. His wife worked in the school district in countless roles as well; she started her profession in the urban school district as an instructor at one of the four high schools in the district. She progressed professionally from an instructor, to a special education counselor and ended her career as a regular counselor in the district.

School Environment

Upon visiting the school for the first time, one might wonder about the contradiction of how the school appears isolated although it is actually located in the middle of an urban school district. I anticipated seeing a school surrounded, and possibly crowded, by neighboring apartments and houses but there is open land and wooded areas on all four sides of the school. During all my visits, the yard and the landscape of the school grounds were very neat. As a parent or guest enters the front of the school, they enter via the front office where they are greeted by the front office personnel. At the front of the school one will observe that there is an 18x20-framed picture of the couple for whom the school was named. Based on the colors of the benches and on items in the showcases at the front of the school, it is easy to decipher the school's colors and mascot.

The administration hierarchy is based upon a leadership structure headed by a female principal, two male assistant principals, and two female counselors. During my

several visits to the site, all of the administrative leaders were visible throughout each of the days. The counselors have morning duty every other week and lunch duty every day. The administrators are on duty every morning and every day at lunch. The teachers have a rotation every two weeks for 45 morning duty. I observed that the teachers in the building make themselves known throughout the course of the day. During the class exchange during the day, the teachers stand in front of their classroom doors. The teachers were visible during classroom exchange to facilitate a smooth classroom exchange for the student body. The climate of the school reveals the philosophy that administrators, counselors and teachers are visible at all times. The school, during my visits, was always very structured and orderly. The students wear uniforms on a daily basis and the uniforms are color coded by grade. Each grade level wears different color shirts, but all students may wear the same color pants. The seventh graders can wear white and yellow shirts and the eighth graders wear purple and black shirts. Both the seventh and eighth grade student body can wear khaki and black pants with their school uniform shirts. The structure is visible all over the building throughout the day. There are one way hallways to facilitate students getting to classes in a timely manner. The design and layout of the school is such that the school is sectioned off into various grade levels. The seventh graders take classes on one side of the building and the eighth grades take their classes on the other side of the building. The only classes that are not sectioned off by grade levels are the electives, because there are both s grade levels in the elective classes.

While walking around the campus at various times to speak with the interviewees, teachers were very friendly and had outgoing personalities. Teamwork was evident as I observed the various teachers in the different departments and it was difficult to believe that the faculty and staff had only worked together for two years, because the school was only recently opened during the 2010-2011 school year. The staff at this urban school appeared to really get along with one another, the rapport that was exhibited amongst coworkers was very positive.

Participant Profiles

This section presents an overall describing profile of the participants; its purpose is to provide information on their backgrounds and their personal educational experiences for the reader to get to know and understand them. This is important as it will help in getting to the main purpose of this study which was to identify, examine and interpret the philosophy, ideology, and educational practices of these five teachers of Gifted and Talented African American males. These participants were each assigned a pseudonym by which they are referred to throughout their individual profiles and the rest of the chapter. The participant profiles are presented in alphabetical order; with no specific significance to that order. The profiles of the participants (pseudonyms): Betty-The Nurturing Veteran, Gina-The Authoritarian, Monica-The Accountant, Stacy-The Savior and Wanda-The Disciplinarian are presented here in alphabetical order. Table 4.1 summarizes the demographics of the participants (also presented in alphabetical order).

Betty-The Nurturing Veteran

Betty is a veteran teacher who has been in the education field for a long time. My first impression during this interview was that all her students must like her in the classroom. She is firm in her convictions and beliefs but she has a very easy going personality. It is easy to perceive Betty in a role of being the students' mom away from home because she is very nurturing in regards to her students' needs inside and outside of the classroom. She is very humble about the success she has with her students.

Betty is a White female in the age ranges of 51-55. She grew up in a small town in central to western Kansas. Betty lived with her mother and father as well as five siblings while growing up. She is the oldest of six children. She went to the public local school in her small rural town from kindergarten until she graduated from high school. Growing up she knew that neither one of her parents graduated from high school. Her parents instilled in her mind that high school would not be the end of her educational career; they always told her "you will go on to college." Since her parents had the responsibility of raising six children, when it was time for Betty to go to college, she had to go to a local college because financially her parents could not afford to send her off far away from home.

Betty always wanted to be a teacher but she struggled with deciding if she wanted to major in English or Math, she chose English. She was an English teacher for about six years and then a shortage of math teachers became an issue in the mid-1980s. She was approached by her then high school principal who told Betty she only needed three hours to be certified in math, needless to say she went back to school and took the

additional three hours and is currently still teaching math. Her current teaching assignment is 8th grade Math teacher and Math Department Chairperson. Betty has 23 years of teaching experience.

Gina-The Authoritarian

Gina is a very stern, outspoken teacher. I thought early on in our interview that she is not an individual to be taken lightly in the classroom. During our interview, I was waiting on the edge of my seat wondering how she was going to respond to each question. Although you can hear the authority in her voice, Gina is very soft spoken. Gina was possibly the most frank and direct with her responses during all interviews.

Gina is an African American female between the ages of 36-40 who was raised in the military by both parents. Both her mother and father served in the military. She elaborated that her military experience began in Fort Benning, Georgia. Being in a military family she moved around to different military bases depending on her parent's military assignment. She talked about how she was in the gifted and talented program and even though she moved around to different military bases she was able to remain in the gifted and talented program throughout high school.

During her early years in school, she attended school on the military base in Georgia. When Gina moved to Alabama she went to public school. Gina went into the military after high school and served for five years. Once she completed her assignment in she went to school to become a teacher. She explained that her educational experiences were varied having both positive and negative situations in school that prompted her to want to become a teacher. Her current teaching assignment is 8th grade

Language Arts teacher and Language Arts Department Chairperson. Gina has 14 years of teaching experience.

Monica-The Accountant

When I started the interview with Monica, she revealed an abundance of information in regards to my research topic. She came across as a rigid teacher and I wondered if her approach in the classroom would be similar. In her classes, Monica did not treat her middle school students like adolescents; she treated her students like young men and women. She held her students accountable to a higher expectation of learning and performance. She is an avid believer that if you raise the bar of expectation for the students then they will rise to the challenge. Monica understands that her students are in middle school but she believes her approach in the classroom is preparing her students for high school and beyond.

Monica is an African American female between 36-40 years old. She is a native of Houston, Texas. Monica stayed in Houston, Texas for the majority of her life, moving to San Antonio, Texas for one year. She was raised by an educated single mother--an attorney who stressed the importance of an education to Monica at all times. Monica remembers that her grandparents and aunts and uncles all attended college but none had graduated prior to Monica's mother. She focused on becoming a graduate as well and it was on this journey in college she discovered she wanted to be an educator. Monica attended Catholic School from Pre-K through the 12th grade. Her first experience of public school was as a student teacher in an urban school district. Her

current teaching assignment is 8th grade Science teacher. Monica has 11 years of teaching experience.

Stacy-The Savior

Stacy of all the candidates I interviewed was the most laid back and easy going during the entire interview. She came across throughout the entire interview as a savior, her goal and hope was to reach the lost and forgotten children. Stacy didn't let her ethnic background interfere with the relationships she had with her students. She stated her early years in school prepared her to work with students from all backgrounds.

Stacy is a White female between the age of 26-30. She grew up in the southern region of Texas where she was raised by both parents. She was educated in public schools. The one person that comes to mind when she thinks of how she became an educator is her Grandpa. Stacy talked about how her Grandpa was always teaching her history and from early on history became a passion of hers. The schools she attended growing up were very diverse, no one ethnic group was dominant, and the ethnic breakdown was very balanced. The diversity was influential in her decision to teach in an urban school. Stacy mentioned early on during our interview that she wanted to work with underprivileged kids from various ethnic groups. She was very adamant that she did not want to work in a monolithic culture. Growing up in school she had friends from different ethnic groups and mentioned that having peers from various ethnic groups helped her to get along with others and learn easier because she got to experience different perspectives from different lives. The area that she wanted to service is what

prompted her to select her current employer. Her current teaching assignment is 7th grade Texas History teacher. Stacy has five years of teaching experience.

Wanda-The Disciplinarian

Wanda is a very candid teacher that was very outspoken on her thoughts and opinions throughout the duration of our interview. She spoke with a strong and forceful tone in her voice. She explained what she experienced in her classroom and reflected on the need for resolutions. My impression during this interview was that Wanda was just waiting on someone to ask her how she felt on the issue of “The Underrepresentation of African American Males in Gifted and Talented Programs.” No matter what interview question I asked her, there was no delay in her response to the question. She gave very detailed and blunt responses at all times.

Wanda is an African American female between the ages of 31-35. She grew up in the southeast region of Texas. Wanda was raised in a two parent home which she described as being very influential in her educational experience. She went to private Christian school from kindergarten until the eighth grade. She attended an urban public high school. There were several people that were integral in Wanda’s choice of becoming a teacher: her parents, her 5th grade teacher that introduced her to writing, and two college professors. Her current teaching assignment is 7th grade Language Arts teacher. Wanda has eight years of teaching experience.

For each of the interviews with the five participants, I began the interview with the same question, “We are talking today about gifted and talented students in middle school, describe your own middle school experiences?”

Participant Observation Profiles

This section summarizes data collected from the classroom observation instrument for each participant. The purpose is to provide an overall view of how the teachers interacted with African American males and other students in the classroom. Although teachers were given dates when observations would possible occur, there was no prior notice to avoid rehearsal of classroom instruction or student behavior during the observation. The classroom observations are important because they will either confirm or negate responses regarding pedagogical practices. Classroom observational data is presented using the same pseudonyms and in alphabetical order as presented in the participant profiles.

Betty-The Nurturing Veteran

Betty is a White female teacher who taught Algebra I. There were 11 students in the classroom. The class was ethnically diverse with 4 African Americans, 6 Latino Americans, and 1 European American student. There were 5 males, and 6 females. Two of the African American students were male. The layout of the classroom was very student friendly. The objective and the lesson were displayed on the whiteboard, allowing the students to come directly into the classroom and get on the task for the day. There were visuals relating to math all around the room and especially on the bulletin boards. Betty's classroom was a very print rich environment.

Betty used a loud tone with a firm pitch when speaking with her students. She remained at the front of the classroom during the classroom observation. She did not move around the classroom. Betty maintained order for active learning for the duration

of the class period. There were no disruptions or disciplinary actions required during the instructional class period. The routine of the students was very structured during my classroom observation. During the observation one of the African American male students remained on task and contributed to class discussion. The second African American male student was off task and asked questions that had been previously addressed. Betty did not respond to his questions.

Gina-The Authoritarian

Gina a Black female teacher taught eighth grade English for Gifted and Talented students. There were 25 students in the classroom. The class was ethnically diverse with 11 African Americans, 10 Latino Americans, 3 European Americans, and 1 Asian American student. There were 10 males, and 15 females. Five of the African American students were male. The layout of the classroom was a very product rich environment. The objective was written on the whiteboard. The layout of the classroom was a very product rich environment. Gina's classroom seating arrangement was very unique, the desks were facing north, east and west in the class room; she varied the position of the student's desk in the classroom.

Gina spoke to her students with a soft tone and firm pitch. She was located at the front of the classroom however, she moved around continuously during the classroom observation. Gina walked around the room and made remarks about the student's assignment as she observed. She reacted very professionally to the student responses during her instruction. She did not always agree with the students' responses however, she respected their comments.

She exhibited good classroom management and you could tell there were daily routines in place in the classroom. Gina did not encounter any discipline issues during my classroom observation. The students were involved at all times working in groups and then independently. The routine of the students was very structured in the classroom. Gina's military background is evident in her demeanor and the tone of the classroom. Gina spoke so frank to the students on the verge of being stern and the students replied yes ma'am and no ma'am to all statements.

There were 5 African American males in the English gifted and talented classroom. All the African American males were on task in the classroom. It was apparent that Gina had a very positive relationship with all the young her students. Gina worked well with the African American males in her class, offering assistance, feedback and guidance as she walked around the classroom.

Monica-The Accountant

Monica is a Black female science teacher. There were 18 students in the classroom. The class was ethnically diverse with 7 African Americans and 8 Latino Americans, 2 European Americans, and 1 Asian American student. There were 10 males, and 8 females. Four of the African American students were male. The layout of the classroom was designed for a science lab. There were six lab tables in the room. Lab safety was a very integral component of the layout of the room. There were visual safety posters and equipment displayed throughout the classroom. The objective was displayed on the whiteboard via the light pro. As the students entered the classroom they made note of the whiteboard for their assignment. There were illustrations relating

to science all around the room. The posters and the bulletin boards in the roomed signs demonstrated expectations of high levels thinking. The words displayed on her “word wall” were equivalent to SAT and ACT vocabulary words.

The tone of her voice was a firm and the pitch when she spoke was loud. She was located at the front of the classroom at the beginning of her lecture, and once she started the lecture she walked around the room during the duration of the lecture. Monica praised her student’s responses. The student’s demonstrated an established routine as they entered the classroom. They quickly started on their assignments reflecting effective classroom management. Most students stayed on task during the instructional class time. Once students responded, she gave very positive feedback. She was not tolerant of questions that indicated off task behavior and quickly redirected those students. Her responses indicated her expectations of high level thinking. She redirected her students to use their resources and to think.

There were four African American males in the classroom and all but one was focused and stayed on task during the observation. During the observation, one of the male students had a verbal outburst. Monica’s reply could be considered a use of sarcasm. The student complied instantly. The tone in which Monica speaks to her students might not work in other classrooms and maybe not with all students. However, the tone and the way in which Monica spoke with her students seemed to work for her and her students during this observation. Due to the structure in the classroom, no disciplinary actions were warranted.

Stacy-The Savior

Stacy is a White female history teacher. This was a very large class; the layout of the classroom was very cluttered and overcrowded. There were 22 students in the classroom. The class was ethnically diverse with 6 African Americans, 12 Latino Americans, 2 European Americans, and 2 Asian American students. There were 10 males, and 12 females. Two of the African American students were male.

Stacy's position was at the front of her class during the observation. The objective and the lesson were displayed on the whiteboard; however, the students did not respond with consistency. The students did not exhibit any established routines in the classroom during my observation. At the beginning of class there was an excessive amount of movement. There was limited structure in the classroom during the observation.

The classroom walls were covered with maps, and other organizational materials. Most students were engaged in the lesson, but there were several students that were off task during instructional class time. The tone of Stacy's voice was loud and firm when talking to her students. Stacy made very optimistic comments to her students in regards to the instructional content in the history class. The lesson observed included reviewing a video documentary about World War II. Stacy frequently stopped the video to engage in dialogue with her students about the content. Stacy made personal connections with her students as she related current real world scenarios to World War II. Stacy had good interaction with the students; they listened to her as she spoke about the documentary.

There was one African American male who was off task during the instructional class period. He was reprimanded for his behavior; other students were clearly off task but were not reprimanded. During the observation, there was limited structure, and multiple events occurring simultaneously. There was not any need for administrative disciplinary actions to take place.

Wanda-The Disciplinarian

Wanda is a Black female teacher that taught seventh grade gifted and talented English. Her voice had a very loud firm pitch as she engaged in conversation with her students. There were 25 students in the classroom. The class was ethnically diverse with 10 African Americans, 12 Latino Americans, 3 European American students. There were 11 males, and 14 females. Four of the African American students were male. The layout of the classroom was very student friendly in clusters; each cluster had four to six desks in a group. The objective and the lesson were both displayed on the whiteboard. The lesson was to complete an employment application. Wanda's classroom was a very print rich environment displaying motivational posters and posters with English concepts all around the room. Her room was very neat and orderly. As the students came directly into the classroom the application was displayed on the whiteboard.

Monica's position as she spoke with the students was at the front of the classroom during the classroom observation. Wanda validated the student's responses with positive comments. If the student's response was incorrect, she explained why the response was incorrect and gave the students a second chance to respond. The lesson observed in the classroom was an employment lesson filling out an employment

application. Wanda had very effective classroom management in the classroom. She was a very firm disciplinarian with her students. Efficient established classroom rules and procedures were observed as the students entered the classroom. When students were off task or demonstrated disruptive behaviors, they were quickly redirected. Wanda even sent one student to the office after she redirected the student several times for talking in class. She had a very low tolerance for behavior concerns or disrespect in the classroom.

There were four African American males students in the classroom during my observation. The behavior exhibited by the African American males in the classroom was: two students were quiet and on task, one student was redirected when off task, and another male student interacted with the classroom discussion. The direct and to the point attitude Wanda had in her class was very well received by the students. It was my observation that the students respected the tone and manner in which Wanda interacted with her students. The African American males contributed and participated in the lesson and the discussion of completing the employment application. Wanda worked well with the African American males in her classroom and encouraged their achievement in the classroom, as she did with every other student in her classroom.

Table 4.1
Demographic Profile of Participants

Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Self-Reported Ethnicity	Age Range	Length of time Teaching	Length of time Teaching Middle School
Betty	Female	Caucasian/White	51-55	23 years	12 years
Gina	Female	Black	36-40	14 years	14 years
Monica	Female	African American	36-40	11 years	11 years
Stacy	Female	Mixed/Majority White	26-30	5 years	5 years
Wanda	Female	Black	31-35	8 years	7 years

Presentation of Findings: Interviews

This section outlines the major findings of the study in terms of the participant responses. The responses were derived from semi-structured, open-ended interviews (See Appendix A). Questions in this interview guide were informed by the overall research questions (Briggs, 1986) and formulated according to the theoretical framework discussed in Chapter II. Divided according to representative sections, or identified themes, each subsection includes a discussion of the theme and relevant segments of the interviews that are reflective of the identified themes.

The findings in response to the first research question, —How do teachers describe factors that promote achievement with African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs?” revealed insights into concerns of gifted and talented teachers in one urban school district. The emergent theme that was a result of this question is: *Making Cultural Connections*. The theme, *Making Cultural Connections* shaped three subthemes. The subthemes are: (a) *Making Connections with Curriculum*; (b) *Purposeful Pedagogy*; and (c) *Building Relationships with Students*.

Making Cultural Connections

The teachers who participated in the study all reported on how important it is to embrace culture during instructional class time. The cultural norms in the classroom impact the success of African American males in Gifted and Talented programs. The teacher’s statements in regards to being culturally sensitive to African American males educational journey is prevailing. Recognizing inequalities among this peer group, all five teachers were dedicated to trusting that all of their students had the potential to be

prosperous, although some with more challenges than others. The subsequent statements are direct quotes that tell the stories of teachers. Gina had strong viewpoint in regards to teaching English lessons that portrayed the use of culture in the lessons. She stated,

And I think that sometimes just knowing that, and knowing the cultural differences makes you more in tune with dealing with all the students, and I think that's something that comes with experience; we do not get that training; you know, we do not have the cultural training. I think that ultimately that training about meeting our student's culture needs is not offered.

Monica was very vocal about how the differences relate to culture and how these cultural differences were easy for her because of her own cultural background and experiences. She said,

It's easy for me I would think to relate to African American girls and boys because I am African American. I have had to work at relating to Hispanic students and they are the largest population that we have but this doesn't mean I do not have to work with Asians but or any other ethnic background. I totally know for a fact that when they feel valued or I listen for a fact or respect them and their culture, they respond a whole lot better. They have a whole lot better respect for me because they feel I am in tuned to what they are in tuned too, or who they are. In my classes, especially in my GT classes, but I have done this in all my classes, I expose them all too different types of music, if their working independently sometimes we will have salsa music. The kids will say why we got to listen to salsa, I'll say expose your mind, expose your mind. Students will say I want to listen to jazz today. I play different music for different generations. Then I will laugh and say ok, what are we having pop today, rock, or maybe light metal. My goal is my kids will say you listen to salsa, you listen to, they need to know that I am diverse and the goal is I am hoping them as citizens will be diverse too. Just because you're African American you shouldn't close your mind to what the Hispanic culture has to offer. Just because you're Caucasian, do not shut your mind to anything other cultures have to offer. The bottom line is to get them exposed to other peoples cultures and I try to do that and that is what I think build the report in a classroom. But you have to find some ways like going to their games they appreciate that better and they work better.

Gina, an African American female, further suggests that African American male students have a different academic experience with African American teachers as opposed to their experience with their White teachers. She suggested that students tend to blame poor grades on racism and suggest that their teachers do not like them and if there is an African American teacher, there is no chance of using that as an excuse. This she claims forces personal reflection and removes race from the equation. Gina, Wanda and Monica feel that their ethnicity better enables them to get culturally responsive lessons across to African American males, they feel the males are more receptive with the cultural lesson coming from African American teachers.

Monica, also an African American, thought there was a difference in the experience for the students based upon the race of the teachers. She said,

I'm quite sure they do. I'm thinking it's the ethnic background, and a perception. I would think that I would perceive an African/American student as totally different than a Caucasian person based on the fact that I'm African/American so automatically I'm not afraid of you. Number 2, I can understand the whole, you know--if you're from a single parent I understand that cause I'm from a single parent. If your parent is struggling or whatever, I can understand that. I understand what it means to—I understand the whole cause, the whole thing behind the African/American experience, if you would say, and I think that—puts on a different pair of glasses automatically.

Stacy, who declared her racial/ethnic background as Mixed—Majority White, seemed somewhat uncomfortable in answering but suggested there was no difference in terms of the academic or classroom experience for African American males as it relates to culture. In fact she said,

I think it's the same with all. I mean, I really, you know, I've had girls, boys, all ethnicities; I mean I prefer teaching boys, so if anything it's an effort for me to reach out more towards girls but I've had girls of all ethnicities and boys too. I do not think there is a difference in African American male students and other

racess, with how they learn. I think its base upon that person's personality, not race, but personality wise.

Like Betty, Stacy shared the same feelings explained that she did not think there was even a difference in how African American male students learn in the classroom in regards to culture being present but that it's based on personality. Stacy said,

My GT training had no culturally sensitive training to meet the needs of students of color. I think if I hadn't grown up and had friends of color that would be important for someone to have. So that they aren't thrown into a situation and not know how to react properly. Cultural training in GT is good practice for people that have not been in a diversified school, not being taught in one or actually grown up in a diversified school.

As evidenced from the participants' comments, their educational experiences in regards to culture highlight the importance of culture and teachers in terms of the cultural experiences teachers provide in the classroom. The individual experiences that led to each participant's use of culturally responsive practices in the gifted classroom were not as homogeneous. The first subtheme identified is *Making Connections with Curriculum* which identifies the significance of culture and content.

Making Connections with Curriculum

Gina, an African American female, further suggests that African American male students have a different academic experience with teachers that practice cultural relevant pedagogy styles in the classroom as opposed to their experience with teachers that do not exhibit this pedagogy style in the classroom. She suggested that students tend to blame poor grades on cultural differences. This she claims forces personal reflection and removes culture from the equation.

As teachers and trainers we have to purposefully seek out quality diverse resources, diverse literature, ahm, and I'm speaking of literature because of my

background, ahm, just being aware that, you know these African American authors. A lot of times people do not use those resources because they haven't sought them out, they do not know they exist, and a lot of the training that we do is, you know, on the old standards; the old classical literature.

Gina, along with Wanda and Monica were very adamant about the subject being taught in the classroom being culturally relevant to African American males in her classroom.

Gina believes there is a difference on how these males perform based on the cultural activities present in the classroom. She stated,

Ahm, other than being a student of color (Laughing)? I think a lot of my personal experiences leaks into my classroom. A lot of the things I found interesting as a student I try to share. I try to look for things or literature that they can identify with because there's nothing like having to read something and not seeing yourself anywhere in it. I think it's important that they learn that academics relates to them and there are people in academia who look like them; who write about things that matter; who talk about things of interest to that group.

Wanda seemed to speak profoundly on the fact that she was African American and that she could relate to the African American male. She spoke of the importance of culture having its place in the classroom. Wanda said,

Ahm, culture kinda plays the same role it does in every other classroom. It's that your culture, you process things based on your own experiences, and your own experience is very culturally driven, especially at this age because their experiences—they're doing the same thing everyone else is doing but when you go home away from the school to where everybody is in the same boat then when you go home you're not in the same boat, you know, you possibly are not in the same boat. And so I think that as far as the culture is concerned and when it comes to learning, then if you do not understand the mentality and most of the mentality is shaped by your culture and your personal experience, then it's hard to reach those kids.

It was very interesting that Gina did not just concentrate on knowing the African American males cultural norms in generally. It was a passion of hers to demonstrate to

her African American male's literature and novels that depicted African American males in a positive format.

I think they are capable of learning the same thing. I think it's more than strategies. If it's interesting if it relates to them then they catch on to it. If they can find value in it, it catches on to them. But on the other hand if I present something to them that presents African American men in a bad light it alienates them and pushes them away so it's important that I am aware of it and screen what I use. It's some stories that I just won't use. There are some stories I am just not going to use. I won't use Uncle Tom's cabin, I won't use Huckleberry Fin because the African American role models in those stories are negative and it makes them look subjective. And they get enough of that in their everyday life; they get enough in the news without me injecting that into the classroom.

Betty, another White teacher in the study had similar sentiments. She first said she did not know if there was a difference but then went on to say that she did not think there was a difference. Nevertheless, she said she would hope there is no difference. In her explanation, she said that she thought it was more a matter of the teacher in respect of his/her abilities and skills in the classroom and less of an issue related to culture. She said they might have individually different needs but no needs that are different from any other group.

Stacy explained that she did not think there was even a difference in how African American male students learn in relation to their White counterparts but that it was based on personality. Importantly, she noted that she understood the need to be sensitive to certain things with African American students. She explained,

Especially a lot of these children do not have a mom or a dad: they could've never known them; they could've left them; they could be in jail. So when you're talking to a kid I always tell them, "would you like the person that takes care of you or love you?" So that is not, you know, hitting the wrong spot. And I also try and find out if I have a kid that's kinda got an attitude problem, I try and find out, I'll talk to the counselors or I'll try and call home and find out what the situation is, and not just take their kids as attacking me or something wrong with them, or

them having a bad attitude. That I can usually tell that there is some underlying issue or problem.

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A consistent thread in the discussion of culture in the classroom led these teachers to discuss how relevant cultural lessons are used for instruction in gifted education. As such, the second subtheme identified is *Purposeful Pedagogy* which clearly identified the key characteristics of culture and learning styles, from the perspective of participants.

Purposeful Pedagogy

All teachers interviewed stated that African American males need far more engaging activities in the classroom. Also, the teachers realized when they facilitated instructional lessons in the classroom; African American males are responsive to lessons that incorporate movement and discussion. Both of these instructional methods utilized in the classroom encouraged the success of these males academically. Monica stated,

When you hear it in training in general that's one of the main ahm, learning styles that would appeal to African Americans would be kinesthetic learning, some type of hands-on activities or manipulatives. I think it's a cultural thing, ah, in the way that African American students relate in the classroom. I mean in just dialect, the speaking, interacting, that in effect that they need kinesthetic,

hands-on activities, things that are engaging and cause them to understand how the content relates to them, then they act out. The thing that I told you about initially was the fact that these students are very social, meaning they're chatty, they talk. Ahm, they're quite mobile; they need kinesthetic; they need to get up and move around. I think traditionally in a public school setting that has been viewed in a younger age in that a child that gets up and moves around could be viewed as a child that can be special ed. I personally feel if that student were of a different ethnic background then someone would say "this child needs to be challenged." But when it comes to African American males the same viewpoint isn't given when they need to get up and move around, and have hands-on activities.

Betty agreed that African American males prefer activities that require movement during classroom instruction.

Boys need to move; boys need to touch; boys need to stand and get up and move around, and you know and generally that's not something that gets them points in the classroom. African American male's needs are different just like some of the others have different needs. Some of them prefer to work alone; others prefer to work in groups.

A constant subject matter, from the perspective of the participants is establishing relationships with students in the classroom. As such, the third subtheme identified is *Building Relationships with Students*.

Building Relationships with Students

All teachers interviewed agreed that it is essential to have positive relationships with their African American male's students. The better the relationship with the students, the more productive academically the students are in the classroom. Monica said,

I believe that the students that I will consider, ahm, gifted and talented this year relates really well to the fact that we have developed relationships or rapport. Ahm, I think the rapport is necessary in all classes. One of the things I think specifically that African American males definitely need is kinesthetic, hands-on activities; or they need to know how the content relates to them.

Wanda expressed that there are realities with teaching African American males that are different from other ethnic groups such as,

You have to get to know the person and the personality instead of you know, the stereotype of the culture, ahm, and even as far as the academics, you can not assume what someone does and what they do not know till you actually give them a fair shot. Then if you are already talking down to a kid, or assuming they do not know it, ahm, before they even get a fair shot then a lot of times they will just completely shut down. So if you decided I am going to be a discipline problem then I am going to be a discipline problem. If you've decided that I'm not going to pass then I'm not going to pass.

Stacy expressed opinions similar to Wanda and Monica in regards to relationships with African American males in the classroom.

As long as you give them that respect and they feel as though if they work hard and the teacher is appreciative and that you believe in them they will do whatever they need to do to rise up to that level.

All teachers all stated that stereotypes often influence teacher's relationships with African American males in the classroom. These teachers are adamant about forming positive relationships with their students in the classroom. Gina said,

I try to separate stereotypes from my class room by looking at my experiences. Experiences, you have to get to know your students, you have to interact with them, and you got to get to know your students.

Monica was very vocal about the importance of establishing relationships with African American males. She stated that there are stereotypes that exist in the classroom and there are realities in the classroom. She felt this way about relationships,

I think relationships are major and you cannot build relationships unless you are open minded and willing to open yourself up to other people's experiences. If I show an interest in the child, then the child will know I am truly interested in their best welfare, and then I may be able to get that child to work for me. I may be able to get that child to let me know...I would be able to find out and let the child know you're just not challenged enough.

Betty mentioned that it is very essential to have relationships with her students in the classroom. She doesn't let the stereotypes of African American males dictate her relationships; she sees each African American male as a child and not the person she sees depicted on television. Betty feels this way,

First of all the stereotypes of going to prison, thug, criminal that is far removed from me I see that on TV and in the news. The person in front of me is different I know that person, I know there likes and dislikes, his interest, his strength and weaknesses. In that sense I do not think about what I do not have in front of me. I think about this person as a child, the other people are adults with the stereotypes.

A common thread in the dialogue of cultural experiences in the classroom led these participants to discuss culture, and their personal desires to demonstrate value. These teacher's narratives are evident of their high aspiration for their students while honoring their individual strengths (gifts and talents). As such, the second theme emerged; *Determined to Make a Difference* from the perspectives of the participants.

Determined To Make a Difference

The findings in response to the second research question, "How do the life experiences of teachers influence their advocacy for African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs?" revealed insights into concerns of gifted and talented teachers in one urban school district. The teachers who participated in the study all reported to being currently employed on a full-time basis and described their journeys into the teaching profession. All the teachers have over five years teaching experience and so they are not novice teachers. Interestingly, they mostly took different paths to teaching. Some mentioned their love for the subject they taught.

Stacy, for example, told of a love for history that was rekindled by a college professor, while Monica stressed that it was a love for science and also the convenience of being able to complete her education course and get a job quickly that led her to teaching. Gina, on the other hand, said teaching was a good fit for what her lifestyle would be after leaving the military: it would allow her to find a job easily and she would be home when her children were home. Only Betty referred to teaching as a “calling” and recalled she was attracted to the profession from her earliest days. Both Monica and Stacy said that their love/and or concern for children also helped to drive them to the classroom.

In describing the most influential people in their educational histories and their pathways to the classroom, each participant cited their parents (especially mothers) and specific school teachers as being the source of their greatest influence. Gina suggested that her 2nd grade teacher was probably the most negative influence on her educational career but by the time she started middle school, she had teachers who challenged her in Science and Social Studies and because they did not accept anything sub-par, like her parents, she was motivated in school and that harnessed her passion for teaching.

Stacy suggested that in addition to her school teachers, her family also led her to the classroom. She explained it this way,

I have two people, well three people-- one would be my 2nd grade teacher. She's the one who actually tutored me for free, two summers, so that I could actually improve in reading, and that they would put me in regular classes. Second one would be my mom, because when she found out that I was not doing so well in school she would be up there as my advocate, pushing, saying “just because my daughter didn't do that well you shouldn't put her in this kind of group. If you raise the standard she'll reach it,” and that's what I did. The third person would be my grandpa. I did not want to go to college when I got out of high school. I

graduated in 2002 and the twin towers were ...in my senior year it happened. I remember I was in health class and I remember hearing it, and a few of my friends were joining the military and I really wanted to join. My dad told me I couldn't. We got into a big argument about it and my grandpa was really the one who pushed me saying –go, if you do not like it then you can always go to the military but at least go and try, and once I tried I loved it, enjoyed it and he actually is the reason why I'm a history teacher. Both my grandfathers were in world wars and had background in the army and navy and just loved history overall so that's what really instilled it in me.

All teachers described the influential people that influenced their lives, educational history and the path to the classroom as their teachers and their parents. Wanda explained,

My parents were my biggest influence and also I had a 5th grade teacher who introduced me to writing and strengths and weaknesses and talents that I would not been aware of probably had I not come into contact with her. And then also I had two college professors who were also pretty instrumental in me choosing to be a teacher and even the career path that I was on before I chose to be a teacher.

Incidentally, Betty also suggested that her parents played the greatest role in helping her decide on a career in teaching and she also gave most of the credit to her mother. She specifically highlighted the challenges her parents faced with their own personal educational experiences yet emphasized how these restrictions influenced her philosophy towards education and her path to the teaching profession. She stated,

Probably the persons who first come to my mind would have to be my parents, my mother especially, only because like I said, even without them having even so much as a high school education, I never knew that. I mean she would help us with as much as she could, with homework if we needed help. She would always make sure we had what we needed for school, and like I said, I honestly didn't know that you could stop going to school after high school because it was just part of our home that after high school--after elementary school came middle school, after middle school came high school, after high school came college and then you were expected to go. And it wasn't until I was—I'm thinking, almost graduating from high school that I found out that my mother and father did not have the high school diploma. And so I think that influenced me because it was

like—here they were, you know, pushing me and so I thought, you know, there must be something to this going to college and that led me to teaching.

Similarly, Monica explained that her mother played the most important and influential role in her educational history and reason for selecting teaching as a profession. She described her mother as the driving force for her passion and value for education, much in part because of the struggles she faced as a single African American woman who struggled financially but made a way for her to have the very best in terms of her educational prospects. She said,

I look back on my mother on a regular basis: in kindergarten I knew that I was Black and female and I had two strikes against me already, and I had to work harder than the next man. Grades were important and I was told that it [school] was my job. I didn't have any children to raise; I didn't have any chores basically to do. My job was to get good grades. If I didn't understand then I needed to say something. My mother did not let my average fall below a $\text{--}\epsilon$." A $\text{--}\epsilon$ " it was unaffordable but I had to have personal tutors; I never attended anything after school. As far as receiving help I may have (inaudible), if I needed some help, which was rarely the case, I might have needed some refocusing or redirection but that came from home, and I have to definitely say that the majority of my ideas and views on education really came from a professional, single, African/American woman wanting her child to be a success and to actually value education.

As evidenced from the participants' comments, their educational experiences highlight the importance of family and teachers in terms of the influence on their educational paths and decisions to making teaching their chosen profession. The individual experiences which led to each participant teaching in the gifted classroom were not as homogeneous. All but Betty stated that teaching was not their first career choice, and that teaching Gifted and Talented Programs was not their choice either. Betty was the only one who wanted to get certified in gifted and talented education. Even though Wanda, Stacy, Monica and Gina didn't seek gifted and talented

certification, their personal upbringing in diverse backgrounds motivated them to work with African American males like they all had teachers that motivated them when they had adversity growing up and going to school.

Betty, who has been teaching for over two decades, and the only participant to describe teaching as a calling for her, arrived at teaching gifted education more based on account of her personal teaching experience and based on her reflection on the state of education in the school in which she was a teacher. She suggested that it happened this way,

I think it probably really hit me, (thinking)--let's see, I've been back ten years now—probably four or five years ago. It really began to hit at home with me that we were putting our special education kids got extra attention, extra money allocated, extra help, and we were to the point with the standardized testing that we were really focusing on bubble kids, kids who needed that extra push to pass, and passing rates were important, getting everybody to pass, and I began to realize that: what about these kids who are in no danger of being on the bubble, these kids who pass without any problem? What's happening to them as far as—are we challenging them?

Betty further explained that she was having some inner turmoil as she felt that some students were not being given the necessary attention. She questioned,

Are we perhaps turning some of these kids off to school because, you know, we're working so hard and giving incentives and pushing everyone, except those kids? And, I think it's important that we stretch those kids, I mean, yes I know learning comes easy to those kids but I think it's important also that they have challenges sometimes that they have to struggle a little bit. I think it's important that they learn to struggle with issues and not—they shouldn't become adults with everything coming easy to them. And so it's important that we give them appropriate challenges, and give them some of that same experience, and yet stretch them as far as we can because—nothing against regular education students or special education students but more likely than not those GT students are going to be our innovators, our, you know, come up with some idea, just those people who think outside of the box sometimes, and I didn't want to lose kid's interest, and I thought that we needed to just stretch them more.

While Betty sought teaching responsibilities for gifted and talented students, Monica felt her assignment was more forced upon her--although she later clarified to say the assignment was given to her mainly due to her classroom management and to the issue of test-scores. She explained,

I think the assignment was given to me basically, probably due to test scores and the way that I ran my classroom. I kinda got pigeon-holed in the 8th grade, cause for whatever reason I was the 8th grade teacher and since I became an 8th grade teacher I kind of thrust myself into learning those things that I was deficient in for the 8th grade. It wound up being that one of my weaknesses is earth science. It's kinda like somewhat of a specialty for me now. And so I think I've remained in GT just because of my questioning style, again, normally I've had some really pretty decent scores, 90% and above in science tests and state tests, and so I think that accounts for me being, or continuously being in the GT course.

Gina explained that she has been teaching in GT programs intermittently during her 14 years of teaching experience and she also felt her role was assigned because when she was observed in her classroom, she was deemed to be a good fit for teaching GT. Indeed, Stacy's experiences were more akin to a combination of Betty's and Monica's/Gina's experiences, she has been teaching in the gifted and talented program for the past 3 of her 5 years of teaching. She explained that while in her second year of teaching, there was a problem with the GT teacher. This problem was something she recognized and often reflected on and as a result she was given the task of teaching the GT students. Stacy was determined to be different from the other teacher and complained,

The GT teacher that they had there wasn't doing anything with the kids. She wasn't differentiating her curriculum; she wasn't doing history or anything worthwhile with them; and they weren't very successful on the benchmark and so forth.

As gifted and talented teachers with a wide spectrum of experience, the participants each spoke at length about their desire to have all their students succeed while highlighting

their perceptions of the characteristics of GT teachers as well as their personal goals as teachers of GT students. The teachers that impacted and influenced these gifted and talented teachers had such a great impact on these teachers' educational lives because the knowledge base their respective teachers had in their content areas touched these teachers' lives growing up. Therefore, these teachers became advocates for their African American males stating being as knowledgeable as they can in their content areas. In describing the characteristics of a GT teacher, Stacy described why she enjoyed teaching GT students. She said,

Well, I like to have discussions and conversations and I feel as though they're really able to do that with me. They can get my jokes, my sarcasm, and really interact. So when I bring up a topic they're not going just sit there and be scared, they're very outspoken, and I really enjoy that part because I am too, outspoken so, I think we get along in that way.

Further discussions with Stacy revealed that her primary desire is to bring them to love history (her content area) and to raise the bar for them. This "raising the bar" or providing interesting challenges for these students requires a demand on the teacher because as Wanda pointed out,

You have to be willing to think outside of the box, because GT students often think outside of the box. They're brilliant but at the same time if you do not know how to tap into it then you may not even realize that they are smart.

Stacy declared the importance of content mastery for GT students and in her classroom, she was observed as very inflexible as she did not seem to encourage any discussion which would facilitate thinking outside of the box. The entire classroom observation revealed a keen emphasis on sticking to the lesson plan (as planned) -- with the entire focus on content mastery.

In discussing the demands on the teacher, Gina included how important it was to encourage curiosity and to support the students especially in terms of their curiosity. She noted,

You have to be somebody who is not afraid to say “I do not know, let’s find out,” because the GT kids have interests that are wide and varied and they test you, and they want you to be honest and up-front with them, so you have to do that. Somebody who is not afraid of research, who’s not afraid to try something new, think outside the box, and somebody who’s feelings aren’t hurt easily, because GT kids challenge you. You have to have a tough skin because truly gifted kids seek ways to trip you up. So you have to be prepared to be one step ahead of them, you know, you have to be well researched and firm in your content area.

In addition, Monica believes teaching GT students means being required to have an open mind and always being forward thinking. She acknowledged that teaching GT students is not for everyone because it requires,

Someone who definitely plans, and if you do not plan, meaning pen and paper, then you have to be a thinker. Someone who is mentally planning; someone who is constantly thinking about the assignment; someone who knows their material or content area strongly or in such a manner that they can relate that information to students personally. They can present the information beyond the textbook. Someone who can give them real-world experiences or talk to them about a particular topic in their mind and make it interesting either to something that they know, something that will affect them in the real world; somebody that can elaborate; somebody that actually is somewhat—I hate to use the word expert, but someone who knows their material.

While Gina and Stacy emphasized the importance of content expertise, Betty explained what she believed to be the main requirements for a gifted teacher. She explained,

I think you need to be enthusiastic about what you teach; you obviously have to have the content knowledge above the grade level you are teaching because these kids are probably going to ask questions that you need to know where we’re headed after this. So you have to be passionate; you have to be excited; you have to be willing to, I think sometimes let go of some things. I know a lot of teachers complain about GT kids. They do not like teaching GT kids because they’re chattier; they’re noisier. To me that’s a good thing because when their brains are working they’re generally also talking, and they are chatty but they’re chatting

about important—not important stuff but pertinent to the subject and the assignment. And so I think you need someone who is flexible, as far as allowing those things to happen, flexible as far as if they ask a question, ok, you may have to spend five minutes going—wasn't on your lesson plan but I think it's important that we answer all their questions because, they are thinking, and I think as long as they're thinking we need to keep nourishing that and keep putting that in there. Not saying you digress totally, but answer their questions. Do not leave them wondering and then come back to the topic at hand.

While observing Betty's classroom, it was very obvious that she was firm in dealing with her students. Nonetheless, she maintained a soft tone throughout the classroom and seemed to have all students engaged. She was very flexible in her approach and encouraged group discussions while using effective classroom management techniques.

The teachers in this study express a deep yearning towards increasing and improving learning and developmental opportunities for academically gifted African American males. In so doing they describe appropriate approaches to teaching GT African American males where distinct from teaching other students from different backgrounds. These multiple perspectives and approaches are derived from and shaped by their own personal and educational experiences. A consistent thread in the discussion of personal experiences which led these teachers to the teaching profession and to the field of gifted education wants the best for the students while honoring their individual strengths (gifts and talents).

Multiple Means of Identifying

The findings in response to the third research question, ~~How~~ How do Gifted and Talented teachers of African American males participate in and Influence identification

and referrals of African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs?” revealed insights into concerns of gifted and talented teachers in one urban school district. The third theme and fourth themes identified are (a) *Multiple Means of Identifying* and (b) *Biased and Unequal* with subtheme: *Behavior Challenges* which identifies measures to identify students for gifted education, from the perspective of the participants.

In this district there is a standardized process for admission into gifted and talented programs, and the use of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) test scores is the primary method of identifying gifted and talented students in this district. This test evaluates students' aptitudes at all stages of their development as readers. All of the teachers interviewed profoundly spoke of other methods that should be utilized when admitting students into gifted and talented programs. They believe if other measures were used in regards to admittance to gifted and talented programs, more African American males would be identified for these programs in this school district and across the United States.

In an ideal gifted and talented program all students would be considered using multiple evaluations for admittance. Betty felt this way about the use of ITBS testing to identify gifted and talented students in her classroom,

Yes, I definitely, definitely have students in my classes that should be in gifted classes. I have a student that has a disparity, he's actually, according to ITBS would not be GT, would not qualify for GT in our district. But in math he would have qualified back in the second grade and would have remained there based on his scores.

Stacy had an opinion in regards to the use of ITBS test scores as an identifier for students that are referred to gifted and talented programs,

I do not think it should be one test or one year the students are tested. If the ITBS previously used isn't good, doesn't mean that in a few years the kid isn't ready to be tested again and moved into GT. I do not think it should be the ITBS test and I think it should be both ITBS testing and teacher recommendation, so if a teacher does not catch that student is gifted and talented that hopefully the test can. Or if not a good test taker, that doesn't mean they are not gifted and talented, it just means they probably have testing anxiety. I think really it should also be based on work displayed in class and teacher recommendation. I think it should be both, not just standardized test.

Monica thought this about the identification process of African American males that are referred to gifted education in regards to the state mandated test,

I would need to look at the student history. I would need to look at qualitative results on some tests. The standard test to be used would be ITBS; however, they would look at the students TAKS/STAAR scores and report cards.

Betty felt this way about the documents used to admit African American males in gifted and talented programs. She said,

Right now mostly ITBS; there can be teacher and parent recommendation. I think teacher recommendations are just as important, but need to make sure not teacher pleases. An ideal GT program for me would be with the rigor and relevance. Everything would be project base with real world, creative and critical thinking.

Wanda had similar beliefs about looking at African American males for admittance into gifted programs, she indicated

I think other criteria should be looked at when admitted into GT programs besides standardized testing. I think they should not just look at the test, but the consistency of your work ethic and their grades taken into account as well. The standardized test, I think some students are smart but not just good test takers. I think that they do need to be taken into account, but that can not be the only factor it needs to be a combination of things to use to identify students. Testing we can start with testing, and then we need to look at your work ethic, your history and things like that to see if you're really GT material. You have a lot of kids sitting in regular classes because they are only tested based on teacher recommendation instead of everyone being tested across the board. There should be other factors looked at when trying to identify kids for GT, not just standardized test. I think that whenever you leave it to the teacher to identify or suggest that a student is recommended for GT services there are personal biases.

No matter how professional you are trying to be, it's just human nature there are some biases."

Gina like all the other teachers gave options for African American males being admitted in gifted and talented programs. However, Gina had the most detailed plan and she said,

Parent surveys, teacher recommendations, student questionnaires, student interviews, all give a more complete picture of a child other than some numbers on a paper. The scores can be skewed if the child has test anxiety, if he had a bad day, anything can happen and they just didn't feel like doing it that day and can make the test invalid. We should never admit a child on testing alone.

Monica had similar viewpoints as Gina did in regards to the use of standardized test as identification of gifted and talented students. Monica responded,

I think the only factor that should be looked at is not standardized testing; it's not the only thing that should be evaluated. Besides standardized test scores you need to look at portfolios, the work of the student, and teachers recommendations. You do need teacher's recommendations but you need to see what the quality of the students work is, what the student is capable of in the class.

Betty agreed with Monica and Gina about looking at other options for identification of gifted and talented African American males in gifted and talented programs. All exhibited strong opinions on using standardized test for identification. Betty said,

I think it should be some type of matrix, or portfolio, yes the testing, several teacher recommendations and maybe an interview with the student and the parents. Needs to be more than just the student and the piece of paper and the #2 pencil to be admitted into GT. AA males are just not good test takers. And if that is your only criteria to be identified for GT, hopefully it's not the only criteria. But if it's the number 1 criteria, then you lose AA males to begin with.

The teachers in this study express a deep yearning towards increasing and improving learning and developmental opportunities for academically gifted African American males. In so doing they describe personal experiences that influence their advocacy and appropriate approaches to teaching GT African American males where

distinct from teaching other students from different backgrounds. These multiple perspectives and approaches are derived from and shaped by their own personal and educational experiences. As such, the next section outlines the fourth theme, *Biased and Unequal* with subtheme: *Behavior Challenges*.

Biased and Unequal

African American males are not referred to Gifted and Talented programs at the same rate as other students. All but one teacher, Monica stated that she had not seen any African American male students that are in her regular classes that should be referred to GT. All teachers of the teachers say that they feel there is a disadvantage when African American males are referred to GT.

Gina had very strong convictions when she spoke of the stigma that African American males consistently face, she mentioned

African American males have to face getting over the stereotype, getting over the public perception of males as either athletes or thieves or criminals of some type. We do not champion the doctors and the lawyers and the business men those moving the community forward. And if you do not see it you do not know to become it because there is no model. African American males face people who have already formed opinions about African American males in general and refuse to allow anyone to break outside the walls. A lot of people confuse loud and social as being ignorant. This is not always the case, its culture it's how we interact as a culture.

Monica stated that the African American males she teaches in gifted and talented programs do not have a fair chance. Therefore, she always pushes her students harder because of the obstacles they face. Monica said,

African American males are classified or perceived as someone that may be a criminal or have criminal intent. If you are a male you are perceived to be a criminal or perceived to be subpar. You just have fear. I feel the African American male is feared on many levels.

Wanda said the African American male is under attack when considering how they are depicted on local and national news reports.

I think they come in being targeted as being different from the beginning; I think our African American males especially come in targeted as being different. Stereotypes and realities, you have to get to know the person and the personality instead of the stereotype of the students culture.

Betty agreed with everyone that participated in the study in regards to how African American males are portrayed, she said

There are stereotypes of going to prison, thugs, criminal that is far removed from me that I see on TV and in the news.

As affirmed from the participants' comments, their view point on how African American males are perceived as negative, this impacts some teachers' perceptions, impacting teacher efficacy. As such, this next section outlines the subtheme *Behavior Challenges*.

Behavior Challenges

Behavior challenges are obstacles that impede classroom instruction. These challenges are points of contention and affect the referral of African American males into gifted programs. Gina had strong opinions about the referral process in gifted and talented education. She felt like all the other teachers, that African American male are not referred to gifted and talented programs because of their behavior in the classroom. And that is often a stereotype associated with African American males, their behavior

exempts them from being admitted into gifted and talented programs. Wanda felt the behavior of the African American males is a major stereotype on why the referrals of African American males are low, she said

I think that they face the struggle of being prejudged for the most part because when we look at the news, when we read the newspaper, when we read the blogs, whether it's for your regular Joe or even celebrities, then we are depicted as nothing. In the educational system I feel like that again the biggest struggle that they face is being prejudged.

Stacy agreed with Wanda about the prejudices African American males endure, she states

African American males face discrimination in society. And I think a lot of times based on that there are prejudged. So if kids have a bad attitude even though they might be really smart, they are less likely to be referred to GT or accelerated. Not because they shouldn't be there but because they think they all will be a discipline problem. I think the main reason why I think there's a discipline problem in the first place is that they are bored. So if a kid has a bad attitude even though they might be really smart, they're less likely to be put in GT or accelerated. Not because they shouldn't be there but because they think there'll be a discipline problem. And I think the main reason why I think there's a discipline problem in the first place, is that they're bored. And like I told you previously my school was pretty diversified. So I think there is a stigma with like I said with either being loud, not having proper grammar that people look at someone and assume they are not intelligent or they do not have those capabilities.

Gina feels that some students are not referred because the teacher sees behavior first and not the academics.

I do. I truly believe that. I've seen it a lot; I have kids and, you know, this particular case I've asked that he be moved to the accelerated class, and I was told flat out, ~~no~~, "no," because of his behavior. I think a lot of times with African American males because they tend to be a little aggressive tend to have discipline issues. And once you labeled it sticks and it continues, the cycle you just can not get away from beyond a certain age. Some teachers feel they are athletes, they are poor students, loud, aggressive, and combative, they care more about girls than their academics and they are generally poor readers.

Stacy, Wanda and Gina believe that there students behavior in the classroom that weighs on the referral process, comes from socioeconomic issues that happen away from the school. These African American males do not often know how to not bring their personal issues from home to school, often leading to behavior problems. Stacy said the following about socioeconomics and behavior,

I think a lot of times, they let their background or situations at home define them instead of refining them. They get so much anger built up about them , their life outside of school it lets them effect what they do here, I think if we did more counseling with our counselors or district counselors to help with the communication between parents and kids. I think a lot of times the kids give up because they do not think they can succeed in life. Because of maybe their race, family background, culture, accent and so forth.

Gina's beliefs were similar to Stacy's beliefs in regards to socioeconomics and students, she stated

I think that because a lot our children lac exposure because of socioeconomics, schools have to be more vigilant in identifying those students and the background and exposure they need to succeed in gifted and talented programs. We do not feed those kids the kind of mental things they need in order to progress, you know, if you take the kid out of this district and toss them down to Klein, and they are already behind in some other district they are starting behind at a deficit. Because their parents didn't read to them, didn't know to make sure they got into head start programs, to turn off the TV and just have them play. So the schools in these types of situations have a bigger responsibility to seek out these students to look for them to promote and groom those types of kids. Because when they get to college they miss out on opportunities and it just repeats the cycle.

The participants in this study had very strong opinions about some of the negative stereotypes that African American males routinely experience. Based on the teacher narratives, stereotypes are the reasons this diverse group is underrepresented in gifted education programs. Teachers in the study also believe each student should be viewed individually and independently. Teachers should be aware of their personal

biases and consider those biases when considering African American males for gifted and talented programs.

Summary

All of the teachers in the study believed there is an underrepresentation of African American males in gifted and talented education. They were all open to discuss their personal stories, perceptions and beliefs related to gifted programs. They all had life experiences that influenced their advocacy for African American males in gifted and talented programs. Including culture in the classroom in regards to content, learning modalities, and relationships was deemed to be very imperative for success of this diverse group. All research participants agreed that there should be multiple ways of identifying African American males for gifted and talented education, and not solely standardized testing that is utilized in this school district. The teachers stated other measures should be considered when referring all students to gifted programs. Finally, it was agreed by all teachers that biases prohibit African American males from being identified for gifted services.

Presentation of Findings: Observations

This section outlines the major findings of the study in terms of the participant classroom observations. The observations were done using Hassan's (2009) Culturally Responsive Learning Engagement Protocol (See Appendix B), also used because of the theoretical foundation of the study. Additionally, where applicable, notes from the

classroom observations are included to substantiate the interviews or contradict as appropriate.

Utilizing classroom observations as a way to verify what the research participants stated during their face to face interviews was very valuable. What I noticed during the observations was Betty, Gina, Monica and Wanda's classroom observation substantiated their interviews. The four research participants behaved in the classroom and interacted with their African American students just as stated during their interviews. However, Stacy's classroom observation contradicted her face to face interview. Stacy did not interact with the African American male in the same manner in the observation that she stated during the interview. The observations were a valuable research tool used to substantiate and contradict the interviews in the research process. The observations added validity to the participant's interviews.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, I present a brief overview of the study, describing the purpose, methodology and research questions which guided the research. I also present a summary of the findings then articulate how the findings relate to the study's research questions. In conclusion, I present the study's implications for policy, practice and theory followed by recommendations for future research.

Overview and Purpose of the Study

Gifted education for African American males is a complex field which has connections to several related theoretical orientations. For example, these students often face alienation from White students in gifted classes and isolation from their African American classmates who accuse them of acting White (Fordham & Ogbu). Further, plagued by a deficit model of thinking (Valencia, 1997) -- born out of a systematic racist ideology-- a negative perception of this sub-population exists which has far reaching implications for the African American learner, and more pointedly the African American male learner.

The purpose therefore of the study was to identify, examine and interpret the philosophy, ideology, and educational practices of five teachers of African American males in gifted and talented programs in an urban secondary school. The study's research questions were: (a) How do teachers describe factors that promote achievement with African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs? (b) How do the life experiences of teachers influence their advocacy for African American males in Gifted

and Talented Programs? (c) How do Gifted and Talented teachers of African American males participate in and influence identification and referrals of African American males in gifted and talented programs?

In this qualitative study using the narrative analysis approach, in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted with five teachers of African American males in a Gifted and Talented Program in an urban school. Through dialogue with the teachers, there are implications from their experiences which can be transferred to policy, and practice while addressing a gap in the literature as it relates to the perspectives of teachers of GT African American males. Additionally, classroom observations were done of each of the participants' classrooms and the notes from these observations were analyzed and compared with the notes from the interviews in search of corroborations and contradictions.

Discussion of the Findings

For purposes of analyzing the findings of this study and the themes which emerged, I will outline the analysis by addressing each of the research questions. The frameworks that guided this research study were Critical Race Theory (CRT) and the Three Ring Conception of Giftedness (Renzulli, 1978; 1986). As an analytical framework CRT provided the lens through which this study was approached. The Three Ring Conception of Giftedness framework allowed for a more wholesome discussion and conception of giftedness which moves the definition beyond the traditional IQ assessment and identification of giftedness.

The study's research questions were:

(a) How do teachers describe factors that promote achievement with African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs?

(b) How do the life experiences of teachers influence their advocacy for African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs?

(c) How do Gifted and Talented teachers of African males participate in and influence identification and referrals of African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs?

Addressing the Research Questions

Question One

How do teachers describe factors that promote achievement with African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs?

Although not all teachers agreed there were specific needs of African American males that differ from other groups of students, there are overarching distinctions made throughout the interviews these include the following: (1) African American males will quickly dismiss learning if it they do not see the relevance, and (2) African American males need hands-on activities, and (3) African American males in GT programs work better with their teachers if they have positive relationships.

Relevance

The teachers reported that African American students (males in particular) in GT programs may be dismissive towards their work if they are not immediately able to see the direct applicability and relevance to their current circumstance or future lives.

Interestingly, this concept is anchored in the characteristics of adult learners as described by Knowles (1990) when he developed the andragogical model based on several assumptions that differed from the accepted pedagogical models. This tenet of andragogy suggests that adults have a need to know philosophy. Adults often need to know why curriculum is included in the learning process prior participating.

The nine characteristics that (Ladson-Billings, 1994) presented as promoting culturally relevant pedagogy are important to the relevance of curriculum. Ladson-Billings focused on successful teaching styles for African American males. Research indicates that it is important for African American males to see themselves in the curriculum, during classroom instruction. One way to master this concept is for teachers to develop and implement cultural competence at the onset of their educational careers.

Hands-On Learners

The teachers in this study distinguished this learning style, kinesthetic learning (also known as tactile learning), as a preferred learning style for African American males in GT programs. While one teacher in particular admitted that this may be more easily tolerated in the GT classroom, it can pose challenges to more traditional classroom teachers. In this kind of learning, the learning takes place by the student carrying out a physical activity. Previous research (Ewing & Yong, 1992) also suggested that African American Gifted students prefer this way of learning.

Relationships

Another characteristic identified by the teachers in attempting to ensure the success of their African American male students in GT programs is being open to

positive relationships. Building relationships includes earning the trust and respect of these students. In addition, students are aware of genuineness of teachers' intentions. It leaves the onus on the teacher to facilitate and nurture this relationship lessening stereotyping. Students that foster positive relationships with teachers are more successful academically (Bonner, 2001).

Question Two

How do the life experiences of teachers influence their advocacy for African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs?

The life experiences of these teachers influences their advocacy for African American males. The most meaningful variable, as reported by the participants appears to be the limited representation of diverse racial and ethnic diversity in their own educational experiences. The teachers who self identified as Caucasian both seem to ascribe to a color blind ideology. They believe the race or ethnic background of the teachers does not significantly influence the academic experience of African American students. This contradicts existing research (Lewis & Landsman, 2011; Robinson & Lewis, 2011) which speaks to the importance of diversity among the teacher population and the need for a specific kind of curriculum in urban classrooms.

Interestingly, one African American teacher associated the challenges faced by African American boys as merely related to socio-economic status. While all teachers suggested there were disparities this group faced, in terms of advocacy, it was difficult to identify specific ways in which they served as advocates for these male students. In fact, it was one of the African American teachers who pointed out that her mother, a single

parent, worked hard to instill a high value for education. This was not something she observes in her school. This has prompted her to extend herself and advocate for urban students she encounters. She further suggested that parents of African American students enthusiastically supported their children in athletic events. She believes this may influence some of the academic disparities experienced by these students

The culminated years of teaching experiences of the teachers in this study is 61 years. This suggests there may be valuable insights that can inform educational practice and policy. In describing their participation in the GT programs and specifically in relation to teaching African American males in these programs, these teachers report that they are working hard for the success of all students and not just those from minority backgrounds such as African American males.

While they acknowledge disparities among this cohort, all five teachers were believed that all of their students had the potential to be successful, albeit some with more challenges than others. The overall goal reported by the participants is to encourage creative problem solving, develop content mastery, and serve as a role model for their students, regardless of racial or ethnic background.

Question Three

How do Gifted and Talented teachers of African American males participate in and influence identification and referrals of African American males in Gifted and Talented Programs?

All the teachers explained that the school system was an effective institutional obstacle which favored the underrepresentation of African American males in GT

education. They further elaborated there were problems related to the referral process as well as the testing process used in the identification of African American males for GT programming. This finding is similar to the existing research on standardized testing. According to Ford (2004), students of color generally do not make high scores on standardized testing instruments.

Teachers all reported problems related to lack of teacher referral, ineffective or inappropriate tests being administered and deficiencies in the timing of identification. Students who were not identified early in their educational careers were less likely to be identified in later years. In reference to the retention of African American males in GT education, the teachers were less vocal and attributed their retention rates to their particular teaching abilities and how they emulated the characteristics specifically mentioned for the success of all GT students. Interestingly however, the observations showed some discrepancies in the ways the students were taught in relation to the characteristics proffered as the ideal ways in which to teach this group of learners.

The characteristic described by Ladson-Billings (2000) were significantly represented in the participant responses. This evidence confirms the characteristics of teachers that promote culturally relevant practices can influence the identification and retention of African American males in GT programs. There was evidence from the participants that giving back to the community or making a contribution was important to their teaching. The participants believed all students could learn, regardless of race or ethnic backgrounds. Each teacher knew the importance of developing trusting relationships and addressed the needs of the African American male student by using

pedagogical practices that encourage movement. The efficacy of the teachers was high creating environments of excellence. Although each characteristic was not specifically there was significant evidence to support previously identified characteristics essential for the success of African Americans.

My Journey

I have learned on this journey with my son that not all individuals appreciate the different learning styles of gifted African American males. When my family was in the midst of the “storm” with my son we could not understand why his teachers behaved in the manner in which they did with my son. This has truly been a learning experience for my entire family. There were a lot of variables that I did not understand when my son was in kindergarten and first grade. Once I started my research about the underrepresentation of African American males in gifted education I began to see the struggle of the African American male in gifted education. I was unaware that the percentage of African American males in gifted education in the country was extremely low compared to other ethnic groups. During the extensive research I conducted for over 7 years I was surprised to learn that at the core of the underrepresentation, “race” was a vital reason for a lot of what we experienced in the classroom. I often thought “race” was the main issue for how my son was treated by his teachers, but I always dismissed really considering that as being the reason for the constant phone calls in regards to his behavior in class. But when I read about Critical Race Theory, I realized that racial tensions in American, in 2006 still existed and I was extremely hurt by this in

American. I often wondered how much better were the attitudes and beliefs of some individuals were as compared to slavery and segregation.

I was angry, not as educators as a whole, but at those educators that allowed their personal beliefs to consume them to the extent that my son suffered for their derogatory attitudes. Being an educator myself, I took it personally because I go out of my way every day to meet the needs of my students. I meet my students where they are and I do understand that some students need more attention and guidance than other students. I understand that some students have different learning styles and I have to be open to those various learning styles to meet their diverse needs. I often found myself having to separate my role as a parent and an educator. As a parent, my feelings were resilient that I did not build my son up twenty four hours a day to send him to school for his teachers and the educational system to tear him down the eight hours he was at school today.

During my research I could relate my story to the perceptions my sons teachers had in regards to him such as deficit model, low teacher efficacy, and hegemonic behaviors. I often wondered why my son was the only African American males in his gifted and talented classes for kindergarten and first grade. But I later learned during the course of my research that testing and identifying were barriers to the number of African American males referred to gifted education. When I read about how significant it was for African American males to have teachers that are culturally responsive and to include culturally responsive lessons in the curriculum, I instantly thought of my son. I thought that if his teachers were culturally responsive, practicing culturally responsive pedagogy,

would they have been upset that he liked to see and learn about people that looked like him in the classroom at such an early age.

As my son approached the second grade it was very refreshing that his grade teacher was Caucasian, but her perception of my son and his different learning styles in the classroom were phenomenal. This teacher welcomed my son's eagerness to always want to learn more in the classroom. She developed a relationship with my son, which influenced him to want to excel even more academically in her classroom. She was never threatened by the fact that my son always wanted to do work that was at least two grade levels above his current grade level. So what did she do? She gave him whatever assignment that he wanted to work on, and if that meant division in the second grade she gave him the division. Her perception of my son was very nurturing in the classroom and outside the classroom. She had an appreciation of my son's culture and the learning style that best worked for my son in the classroom. He learned best up and moving around. He likes to ask questions, he needed to know the why about everything. His second grade teacher worked in the same district as his kindergarten and first grade teacher. However, the second grade teacher worked at a different school than the kindergarten and first grade teacher. It was refreshing to know that every classroom my energetic and bright son attended the teachers would not all have negative perceptions of African American males in gifted and talented programs. I personally feel that his kindergarten and first grade teacher should attend culturally responsive training so that they could learn how to meet the needs of African American males in gifted education and other diverse students they encounter.

In every aspect of my research I saw my son, his journey and his struggle. I was elated to know that those were the only two years that my son encountered teachers with negative perceptions in regards to African American males in gifted and talented education. My son is going to the 7th grade and the experiences that he has had with Caucasian and all other teachers from various ethnic backgrounds has been very positive. My son is still currently in gifted and talented education and I praise the teachers he had in second through sixth grade that praised and nurtured one of my “gifts” to this world.

Implications and Recommendations

The underrepresentation of African American males in GT programs is of great concern, particularly to educational stakeholders such as parents, teachers, policy makers, other advocates and scholars. Based on the findings of this study and the literature reviewed, implications and recommendations will now be discussed. The study's findings have implications for the field of urban education, particularly as it relates to educational practice, national policy, and theory. Using research by Lewis, James, Hancock, and Hill Jackson (2008) as a guide, this research also calls for a multi-perspective approach in addressing the problems which face urban learners from minoritized populations.

Implications for Practice

In terms of the practice perspective, this study emphasizes the need for culturally responsive teaching practices (Gay, 2000). This means that teachers are required to develop an appreciation of multiple learning styles and to eradicate the colorblind

ideology from the classroom. Pearce (2005) explained that color blindness is the most common practice among White teachers and leaders when they are faced with a racially diverse learning and teaching environment. It is a so-called admission to be blind to race and color although it causes the perpetuation of the privilege, power and domination that arise from it. Color blindness and racial neutrality is a benevolent response to overlook White privilege. Ford (2010) explains that color blindness is another barrier to the underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted education. Colorblindness is generally present when educators do not value how critical culture is in learning.

Implications for Policy

Recruitment and retention of African American males into gifted education programming is of serious concern for policymakers. While it appears that one obvious way to address these concerns would be through a multicultural lens being applied to teacher education, there is no national policy related to the need for diversity and multiculturalism as essential elements of teacher education programs. Additionally, there is no homogeneous application of GT definitions, appropriate testing measures and programs across states; this is further complicated by the poor educational experiences facing many urban students because of under-resourced schools.

Implications for Theory

There is a significantly substantive body of literature relating to African American males and more specifically to their over representation in special education and their under representation in GT programs. The work in this study contributes to this body of literature as the findings, as garnered through interviews and classroom

observations highlight some inconspicuous ways in which teachers that on the surface serve as advocates, but also are plagued with issues of deficit thinking and color blind ideologies.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this research point to a few areas in need of further exploration. While I note that the teachers in this study have long periods of teaching service, it is clear that they come from different backgrounds and different journeys to the teaching profession. Given high attrition rates of first year African American teachers, this study has implications for retention in classroom. Further studies could be done to explore the connection between educational and personal backgrounds and retention of African American teachers in the classroom, especially beyond the first year.

Concluding Thoughts

This research study shows that the experiences of GT teachers of African American males are varied and complex. Their experiences and backgrounds frame their ideologies and in turn the way in which they teach and interact with these learners. It is important to note that despite these differences and diversity in their racial/ethnic backgrounds, each teacher reflects deep commitment and passion for these learners.

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APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Voices of Gifted and Talented Teachers of African American Males In A Secondary Urban School District in Texas

Interview Questions

Participant Background

1. Pseudonym- self or select or to be assigned
2. What is your age range?
 - a. 18-25
 - b. 26-30
 - c. 31-35
 - d. 36-40
 - e. 41-45
 - f. 46-50
 - g. 51-55
 - h. over 55
3. Gender:
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
4. What is your ethnicity?
 - a. Black
 - b. White
 - c. Asian
 - d. American Indian
 - e. Native American
 - f. Hispanic
 - g. Other
5. I would like to learn more about you and your path to teaching gifted and talented students in this urban school. Please tell me about yourself.
 - a. Who raised you?
 - b. Where did you grow up?
6. Did you grow up in Texas?
7. Did you go to school in Texas?
8. What is your employment status?
 - a. Full-Time
 - b. Part-Time
9. How long have you been teaching?

10. So, we are talking today about gifted and talented students in middle school, describe your own middle school experiences?
- a. Urban experience?
 - b. Socio-economic background?
 - c. In the United States?

Participant Educational History

11. Describe your overall educational background (from pre-k to higher ed)
- a. Any GT personal experience?
 - b. If yes, describe
 - c. If no, what prompted you to want to teach GT?
12. Describe the most influential people in your educational history?
- a. Parents?
 - b. Teachers?
 - c. Mentors?
 - d. Church Members?
 - e. Friends?
13. How does your experience in your middle school differ from the experiences here at Arrow ISD?
- a. Ethnic background?
 - b. Special Ed?
 - c. GT?

Teaching

14. What sparked your interest in teaching?
15. Tell me about your earliest memory of wanting to be a teacher?

Teaching Gifted and Talented Students

16. How long have you been teaching GT/Accelerated Classes?
17. What type of GT class(s) do you teach?

18. What sparked your interest in teaching GT?
19. How did your educational background lead you to getting involved in GT programs?
20. When did you first get involved in teaching gifted and talented students?
21. How long have you been teaching gifted and talented students?
22. What type of teacher best fits the model of a teacher for the gifted?
23. How long have you been teaching gifted and talented students in an urban school district? Is this your first experience teaching GT students in an urban school district?
24. How many students are in each of your classes?
25. Do you teach only gifted and talented students?
26. What is the ethnic breakdown of your students in your gifted and talented classes?
27. Are there any African American students in your gifted and talented classes?
 - a. How many do you have in your classes?
 - b. Describe the needs of your African American gifted population compared to other ethnic groups.
 - c. Do you have African American students in your regular classes that you think should be in gifted and talented education?
28. Do you feel there is an advantage or disadvantage for African American males based on the age they are referred to gifted education?
29. Research shows that most students are referred to gifted education in elementary school. Do you refer students to gifted education at the middle school level?

Training

30. Do you feel African American male students have a different academic experience with African American teachers opposed to their experience with White teachers?
31. What kind of specialized training have you received in your academic preparation to teach diverse (students of color) gifted and talented students?
 - a. Describe the source of the specialized training.
 - i. Professional Development Hours?
 - ii. Teacher Education Program?
 - iii. Other Source
 - b. Describe some events in your life that have prepared you to teach students of color?
32. During your GT training, was culturally-sensitive pedagogy discussed in regards to meeting the needs of all GT students?
33. How important do you think this training is to you as a gifted and talented teacher?
34. Do you feel your ethnicity has better enabled you to reach your culturally diverse students?
35. How do you perceive any differences in teaching students from diverse backgrounds?
 - a. Any specific differences to teach gifted and talented African American students?
 - b. Any specific differences to teach gifted and talented African American male students?

Teaching Gifted African American Males

36. Describe your experience in teaching gifted African American males.
 - a. How have these experiences influenced your teaching?
 - b. Tell me about a memorable experience with teaching students of color?

37. How different do African American male students learn when compared to other ethnic groups?
38. What role does culture play in the gifted and talented classroom?
39. How much of a bearing do your cultural beliefs have on your interactions with culturally diverse students?
40. What struggles do African American males face in society?
41. What are some of the negative stereotypes that are associated with African American males?
 - a. How does an educator distinguish between stereotypes and reality in the classroom?
 - b. Describe how a teacher's behavior and expectations influence African American males in the classroom.
 - c. Describe the various opinions that teachers have of African American students in GT programs.
42. Do you feel there are some students who are referred to special education when they should be in gifted education?

Gifted and Talented Program in Your School

43. Describe the overall gifted and talented program in your school?
 - a. What do you know about the history of the GT program in your school
44. What is the identification and referral process for gifted and talented students at your school?
 - a. What are the pros and cons of the referral process for GT students at your school?
 - b. How consistent is this process administered in this school?
 - c. Most referrals to gifted education is initiated by the teacher, how do you feel about this in regards to the number of African American males that are in gifted education?
45. Describe your teaching experiences in this urban school district?

46. What resources would you need if you could design the ideal gifted and talented program at your school?
47. Some people believe that ~~no~~ "services" are needed for gifted students. How would you justify the need for gifted services?
48. What is the best way to service gifted students at your school? In other words, how would you set up a gifted program, if you were not limited by state or local rules? How would you set up a gifted program to work with students in your school?
49. How would the way you set up the gifted program influence the identification of African American male students?
50. There is research that suggests culture, language barriers, race, and socio-economic status contribute to the underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted education programs. What is your opinion on this?
 - a. What can schools do about this?
 - b. What should schools do about this?
51. At what age are most students referred to gifted and talented programs?
 - a. Approximately how many students are referred in this school?
52. How does testing contribute to the underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted education programs?
53. How do you feel about the use of standardized test as admission criteria for gifted education?
54. How culturally sensitive do you think standardized test are as admission criteria?
55. What is the teacher's role in the identification and placement process?
56. What is the purpose of gifted and talented programs in the United States?
57. What other pertinent information related to teaching African American males do you think I should have?

APPENDIX B

Culturally Responsive Learning Engagement Protocol

Instructions to complete your observation:

1. Read over the protocol before you begin your observation.
2. You should spend at least 15-20 minutes in each classroom
2. Your goal is to observe and record your observations. You might ask yourself, ~~“how~~ “how is the student being engaged during instruction?”
Academic engagement denotes on-task behaviors that manifest as a psychological investment in class tasks (i.e. verbal and non verbal participation, completing assigned work, demonstrating enthusiasm while meeting high expectations). This means the student is not merely sitting passively. He/she is actively involved and demonstrates involvement in some of the above ways.
3. Record what you see in each column (Teacher, Student, Observation, Reflections).
 - a. Fill in the top of the form before you enter the room.
 - b. Sit or stand in an area of the classroom where you will not provide a distraction for the students.
 - c. Complete the demographic part of the protocol as you deem appropriate. For example, you might circle the gender of the teacher and his/her race/ethnicity. You might record the number of students by gender and race/ethnicity. This information can be verified later.
 - d. Take notes on what you see as your read the prompts in each column. If you do not have enough space you can continue your notes on the last page of the protocol.
 - e. Finally, what are your immediate conclusions or suggestions for the teacher? Write those recommendations on the last page of the protocol. This can be completed after you leave the classroom.

Remember, the observation shares what you see. What you see is important in our efforts to support teachers as they create and sustain culturally responsive classrooms for all students. There is no right or wrong answer. Determine if this is an observation for our records and PD information or if you want the teacher to receive feedback on what you observed, while you watched him/her teaching – If for PD, the visits will be compiled and discussed with the team.

Thank you for your time and efforts on today. We appreciate your participation and most importantly, students in this school will benefit from your input.

Culturally Responsive Learning Engagement Protocol

School _____ Classroom Number _____ Date _____
Time: From _____ to _____ Observer _____

Teacher -	Students	Observations	Reflections
M/F	AA: M F	Environment	What do you think students gained from the lesson?
Race/Ethnicity	AsA: M F	Halls:	
AA AsA EA LA NA	EA: M F	Classroom door:	
ArA	LA: M F	Room	
Tone of voice:	NA: M F	Arrangement:	What is your evidence of this/these gains?
Where is teacher located?	ArA: M F (Can be verified later)	Bulletin Boards:	
How does teacher react to student responses?		Lesson:	
	Who is engaged?	Objectives displayed?	
What is lesson about?		What do you see?	
What did you learn from the teaching?	What are learners doing?		
What is effective about the teacher's classroom management?	What did learners do to indicate that they were engaged?	What do you feel?	
What discipline actions, if any, took place?			

Notes (continued):

Column 1 - Teacher

Column 2 - Students

Column 3 - Observations

Column 4 - Reflections

Recommendations Based on your observation:

Classroom Design

Lesson (Curriculum) Design

Instruction

Teacher Demeanor